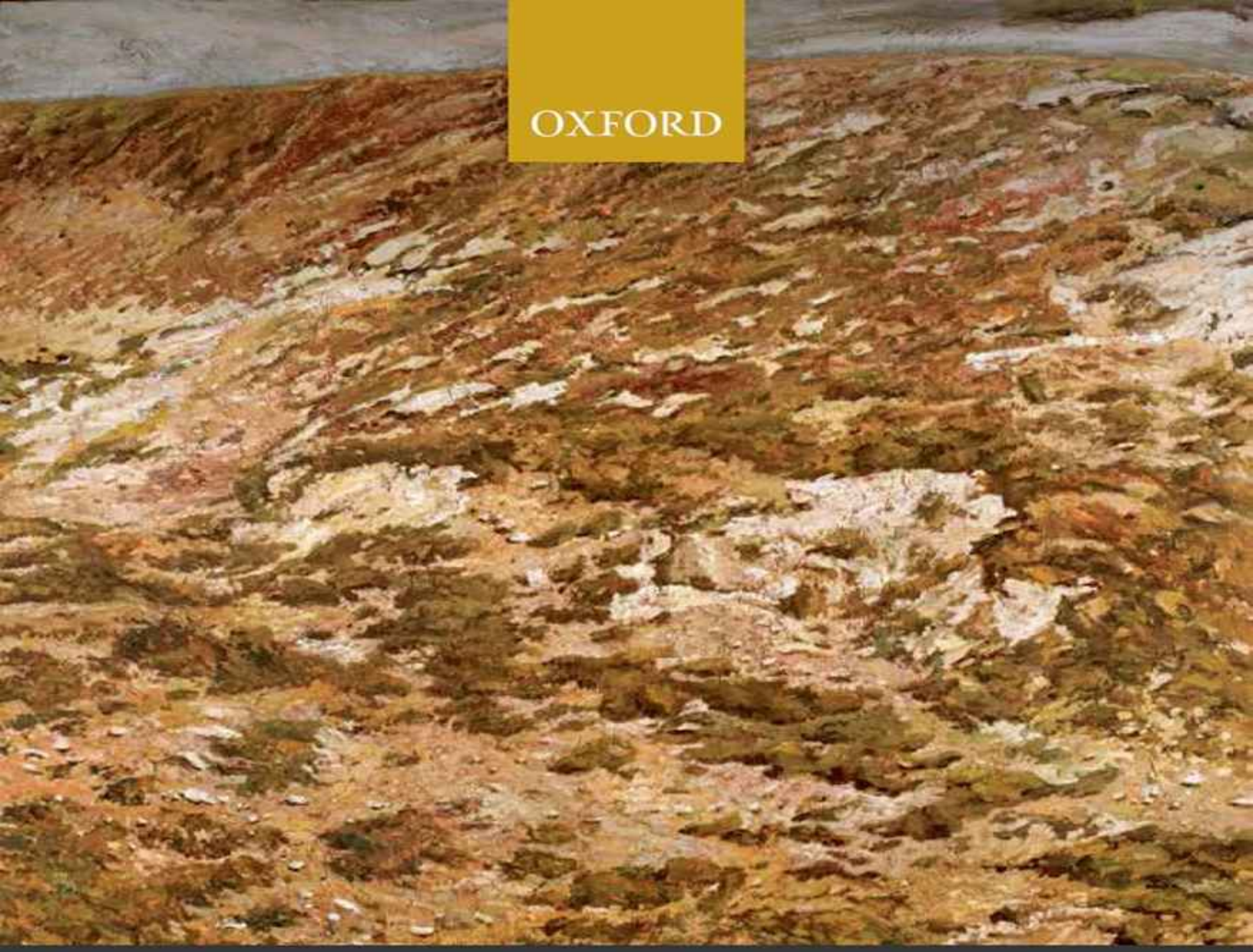

THE MAKING OF THE ABRAHAMIC RELIGIONS IN LATE ANTIQUITY

Guy G. Stroumsa

OXFORD STUDIES IN THE ABRAHAMIC RELIGIONS

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The Making of the Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity

GUY G. STROUMSA

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For Sarah
Forty years later

Acknowledgments

The idea of this book took form during my tenure as Professor of the Study of the Abrahamic Religions at Oxford (2009–14). As the first holder of the chair, I sought to represent in a new light aspects of late antique religious history, on which I had been working for a few decades. It struck me that some patterns later to be identified as ‘Abrahamic’ were already present during the first centuries CE, as Jews and Christians were vying for the title of the true inheritors of Abraham. The book’s main argument, then, is that it is in the religious history of late antiquity that we should look, if we wish to understand the genesis of Islam better.

The book’s ten chapters (most of them published previously in a different version) tackle different issues of this central problem. Although much has already been written on aspects of the problem, it is fair to say more work is needed before a synthetic study can be attempted. At this stage, it is important to realize that the birth of Islam must be seen as an integral part of late antiquity.[1] Without developing a teleological approach, it is possible to analyze the trajectories of concepts and thought patterns that rendered conversion to Islam, on a large scale, possible in the seventh century and afterwards, throughout the Near East.

During the long period of gestation of this book a great number of colleagues have helped me formulate my views, in a number of ways. I am most grateful to them all, although I might not be able to mention them all. At Oxford, Moshe Blidstein, Markus Bockmuehl, Dame Averil Cameron, Beate Dignas, Mark Edwards, Martin Goodman, Neil McLynn, Sir Fergus Millar, Robert Parker, Nicolai Sinai, were my main interlocutors. Other colleagues and friends from various places, Nicole Belayche, Corrine Bonnet, Jan Bremmer, Patricia Crone, Ronnie Goldstein, Yonatan Moss, John Scheid, Shaul Shaked, and Sarah Stroumsa have discussed various aspects of the problems tackled in chapters of this book. So had the late

Sabine MacCormack and Evelyne Patlagean. Thanks to their remarks, this book is probably less inadequate than it would have been.

My gratitude also goes to Rami Schwartz, who has been extremely helpful in preparing the final manuscript for the press and compiling the index, and to Donald Watt, for his precious help in reading the proofs.

Finally, I should like to honor the memory of the Saudi benefactor who endowed the Chair for the Study of the Abrahamic Religions at Oxford (and wished to remain anonymous). For him, scholarship has a role to play in the fight against religious bigotry among the children of Abraham. His vision has sustained me during dark hours of violence and hatred.

Guy G. Stroumsa

Jerusalem

August 5, 2014 (9 Ab 5775)

[1] In this regard, I should like to mention here two important books, which appeared too late for me to discuss their findings in the present work: Aziz Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allāh and his People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), and Garth Fowden, *Before and After Muhammad: The First Millenium Refocused* (Princeton, N.J. and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014).

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Chapter 3: “False Prophets of Early Christianity,” in *Priests and Prophets among Pagans, Jews and Christians*, ed. Beate Dignas, Robert Parker, and Guy G. Stroumsa (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), pp. 208–29.

Chapter 4: “False Prophet, False Messiah and the Religious Scene in Seventh-Century Jerusalem,” in *Redemption and Resistance: The Messianic Hopes of Jews and Christians in Antiquity*, ed. J. Carlton Paget and M. Bockmuehl (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2007), pp. 278–89.

Chapter 5: “Seal of the Prophets: The Nature of a Manichaean Metaphor,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 7 (1986), 61–74.

Chapter 6: “Religious Dynamics between Christians and Jews in Late Antiquity,” in *Cambridge History of Christianity, 300–600*, ed. A. M. Casiday and F. Norris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 151–72.

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Chapter 8: “Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins,” in *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts: Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone*, ed. B. Sadeghi, A. Q. Ahmed, A. Silverstein, and R. Hoyland (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), pp. 72–96.

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Chapter 10: “Barbarians or Heretics? Jews and Arabs in Byzantine Consciousness,” in *Jews of Byzantium: Dialectics of Minority and Majority Cultures*, ed. R. Bonfil, O. Irshai, G. Stroumsa, and R. Talgam, Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture, 14 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 761–76.

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Introduction: From Qumran to Qur’an: The Religious Worlds of Late Antiquity

I

The present book deals with some critical aspects of religion in late antiquity, particularly in the Near East, from the beginnings of Christianity to the birth of Islam. As is well known, the Islamic conquests represented nothing less than a religious revolution throughout the Near East. In particular, they transformed Christian self-understanding in the East, on both sides of the border between Byzantium and the Caliphate. In the West too, the consciousness of the new, powerful challenge to the Christian empire never remained very far. Hence, the advent of Islam constitutes the first real challenge to the belief in the ecumenical destiny of Christianity.[1]

In any study of religion in late antiquity, Christianity will obviously play a major role. While the trajectory of ancient Christianity is usually studied by church historians, it may be worthwhile to approach it also from the outside, taking into consideration its religious *Umwelt* and its broader context, in order to identify differences as well as similarities and parallel phenomena. Sasanian Zoroastrianism, rabbinic Judaism, ancient Christianity, Greco-Roman religion under the Empire, the so-called Oriental religions, or pre-Islamic Arab paganism, are all usually treated as clearly distinct historical traditions, to be studied independently of one another. Officially hailed, inter-disciplinarity remains too often shunned in practice.

The rationale for maintaining the traditional disciplinary boundaries is as obvious as its price is high. If we agree that a number of different religious identities interact in late antiquity, refusing to study them together prevents us from understanding the main vectors of religious innovation and more specifically the deep causes explaining the advent of Islam. We should seek, therefore, to discover the rules of a transformative grammar which could explain patterns of religious transformation. This is obviously not an easy task, but giving up without even trying condemns us to counting trees rather than delineating the forest's contours.

The Islamicist Patricia Crone's latest, magisterial book, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism*[2] offers a striking example of the riches to be discovered by daring to cross disciplinary boundaries. Even when dealing with documents not central to her quest, such as the Gnostic, early Christian and Jewish-Christian texts,

Crone demonstrates the fruitfulness of her method. She works upstream as well as downstream of the *hijra*, in order to detect the deep roots of various myths, theologoumena, or rituals and the early manifestations of later developments. These often survived for centuries, more or less underground, in order to reappear in significantly different cultural and religious contexts.

We have learned to recognize the centrality of religion in forging new identities in late antiquity. Ethnos or culture (in particular, language) had been more obvious formative elements of identity than religion in the classical and Hellenistic worlds. For a very long time, and until recently, the main paradigm for describing the dramatic religious changes of late antiquity was essentially the passage from paganism to Christianity, or from polytheism to monotheism. In the last generation, there is a better appreciation of these complex transformations, which may amount to what one can call a religious mutation.[3]

The continued importance of Judaism in its competition with Christianity, the major impact of dualistic movements, and nascent Islam as a phenomenon of late antiquity, all these have weakened the traditional paradigm, although a new one has yet to emerge. Efforts should be made, imperfect and tentative as they may be, to analyze the complex dynamics of religious change in late antiquity from the perspective of a unified history of religion.

To borrow the categories famously invented by the American linguist and anthropologist Kenneth Lee Pike, I propose to reflect here from an etic rather than an emic viewpoint. Although I have made many efforts, over decades, in order to understand better the religious and intellectual worlds of early Christianity, I have done that not as a church historian or a patristic scholar, but as a comparative historian of religion in late antiquity. In my research, I have focused mainly upon the contacts of Christians with Jews and pagans, as well as upon the formation and development of those internal challenges which the church fathers (the intellectuals of the winning party) called “the heresies,” in particular Gnosticism and Manichaeism.

As is well known, the Constantinian revolution usually remains, together with its sequels throughout the fourth century, the obvious and unavoidable turning point of any ancient Christian historiography. To be sure, one might ask whether this traditional narrative is really compelling. From a despised

and forbidden minority religion, Christianity moved very fast, from Constantine's days on, to the status of a legitimate religion and then to that of the imperial official religion. While Judaism would remain tolerated in the Christian Roman Empire, all public forms of paganism—and in particular animal sacrifices—were forbidden by law after the publication of the Thessaloniki edict (*Cunctos Populos*) in 380. For the theologian and sociologist of religion Ernst Troeltsch, the first chapter in church history, which ended in the fourth century, represented the passage from sect to church. For his friend Max Weber, this transformation represented the passage from a charismatic to a routinized religion. To a great extent, such conceptions still inform much of contemporary historiography of ancient Christianity.

Hence, the traditional vision of the religious context of ancient Christianity is constituted by both its Jewish matrix, mainly until the so-called "parting of the ways" in the first half of the second century, and Roman paganism thereafter, until the fourth century.[4] After the fourth-century watershed, Christian historiography usually functioned in an autarkic way, with other religions relegated to a dark, indistinct background about which there is little to say, or at least little to say that directly impinges on church history.

I shall seek here to offer another approach to ancient Christianity in its multiple religious milieus, by taking the long view, from the birth of Christianity to that of Islam. In that sense, I am aware that I am overly stretching the limits of late antiquity. But, the deep causes for paradigm shifts in religion can only be discerned in the very long run. A view from the Near East offers a perspective different from that of traditional historiography. It shows, rather than the transformation of a Jewish sect into the triumphant Catholic Church, that of a forbidden sect in the Roman Empire into a tolerated one under the Caliphate. Both in those areas that had been part of the Sasanian Empire and in those that had belonged to Byzantium, the Christian communities would become, in the Islamic realm, tolerated minorities—together with the Jews and the Zoroastrians. One can say that the Christians had now reverted, to some extent, to the sociological status of their sectarian beginnings, although not quite. Christians had achieved under the Muslims an official recognition as a tolerated religious community possessing a prophetic scripture (*ahl al-kitāb*). Hence, Christians were members of a tolerated religion, although they were

required to pay a special tax (*ahl al-dhimma*).[5] In that sense, one can trace a trajectory of ancient Christianity which leads it from Qumran to Qur'an.[6]

For the comparative historian of religion, the Near East and the whole Mediterranean, from the first to the seventh century, constitute a rare laboratory where a number of religious communities were in constant contact and conflict.[7] Rather than referring to "sects," a quite loaded word alluding to doctrines deviant from the reigning orthodoxy, we should perhaps speak of communities. These communities were connected through a highly complex web which offered a kaleidoscope of sorts, in which the various crystals constantly restructured themselves in a seemingly infinite number of new structures.

Beyond the many differences between the various worldviews, a religious *koinē* of sorts can be discerned in the Roman Empire and beyond: the numerous religious communities might well have been constantly fighting one another. Yet, they shared a number of presuppositions (usually implicit rather than explicit) that constituted the structures of their religious world.[8] These structures evolved with time, although the consciousness of this evolution was not always clear.

While the Roman world in which the new religion grew and blossomed could be aptly described by Cicero as "a world full of gods," it is important to remember that these gods were not only the Roman gods.[9] The rich religious context of ancient Christianity included, besides Judaism and Roman religion, and not only in the East, a number of Oriental cults from Asia and Egypt (such as Isis, Cybele, or Mithras), and various Gnostic trends, such as Hermeticism, Manichaeism, Mandaeism, and Zoroastrianism. In the late antique Mediterranean and the Near East, the varieties of religious experience and modes of religiosity reflect the interface between a number of cultures and civilizations.

The Jewish world in which Christianity was born can certainly be defined as a sectarian milieu. Side by side with the Pharisees and the Essenes, Flavius Josephus names the "party" (*hairesis*) of the elite—the Sadducees—and that of the partisans of radical revolt against Rome—the Zealots—in the spectrum of Palestinian Jewry.[10] The community of Jewish sectarians in Qumran, on the north-western shores of the Dead Sea, was destroyed by the Romans during the Jewish war in the first century. As is well known, many of the sectarians' writings were found after the Second

World War, a fact which permits us to get a glimpse of their beliefs and rituals. While the specialists still argue vehemently over the exact identity of the Qumran covenanters, it stands to reason to assume that they were Essenes, or close to the Essenes, and that there were some striking similarities between their religious world and that of John the Baptist. For all practical purposes, Jesus himself seems to have had some sympathy for aspects of the Essenes' religious attitude (in particular in his eschatological expectations and his social sensitivity), while in other ways he was probably very close to the Pharisees (a fact which also explains the anti-Pharisee polemics in the Gospels).[11]

Among the first followers of Jesus, who were of course all Jewish, not all gave up, with Paul, on the traditional Jewish patterns of behavior. Those Jews who believed that the Messiah had come, but who refused to give up on Jewish religious law are traditionally referred to in scholarship as "Jewish-Christians." Ebionites (from Hebrew *evyon*, poor), is only one of the various names of the sect. Both the church fathers and the rabbis sought to minimalize their presence and to argue that the sect had fundamentally disappeared by the fourth century.[12] Yet, we know from a number of testimonies that the Ebionites were still present, even if marginally from a sociological viewpoint, in the seventh century. I mean to call attention to the surprising continuity of sectarian milieus, in relation to which I propose to look at the development of Christianity in antiquity.

For the traditional narrative, reflecting Patristic perceptions, the sectarian milieu of the Christian beginnings would soon be absorbed into the new structures created in the inhabited world, the *oikoumenē*, by victorious Christianity. The Ebionites, like the various Gnostic groups, would have disappeared, for all practical purposes, by the fourth century. Of all the numerous sects traditionally refered to as "Gnostic," only the Manichaeans, who had established a real ecumenical church like the Christians themselves, would remain a real, powerful threat to Catholic Christianity.

Such a view, however, does not really reflect reality on the ground. A number of indices reveal the traces of various sects even in very late times. Hence, the Jewish-Christians do not seem to have really disappeared. Even if these sects seem to have been of little significance from a sociological viewpoint, the important fact is that we can now assume with real confidence that some marginal Jewish-Christian communities remained

active in the Near East, in particular in various areas of Palestine, Syria, and Arabia throughout late antiquity.[13]

This rich religious mosaic remained that of the Near East, within and without the borders of the Roman Empire, until at least the seventh century. In this regard, the Arabist John Wansbrough has been able to speak about the "sectarian milieu" within which Islam was born, thinking not only about Arabian Hijaz, but, more broadly, about greater Syria (the Arabic *Bilad al-Shām*).[14] This "sectarian milieu" included not only Christians and Jews, but also a number of religious communities on the margins of the leading traditions.

The religious world in which Christianity developed, from its beginnings and throughout late antiquity, remained pluralistic by nature. I am not arguing, of course, that Constantine and his successors did not transform the status of Christianity in the Empire. What I am saying, rather, is that a continuous thread links, nonetheless, Christian discourse from the origins to the eve of the medieval age. In that sense, the fourth century, despite its undeniable significance, does not constitute in the East a radical game changer, as the history of the Christian communities there cannot be understood in isolation from that of other religious communities. Constant interface entailed a dialectics of reciprocal impact between the different religious identities—identities characterized by their fluidity. One could speak here of intertwined or connected histories—to use a term coined by the historian of early modern India Sanjay Subrahmanyam—of an essentially plural history of religion.[15]

If the birth of Islam constitutes a religious revolution, comparable, *mutatis mutandis*, to the birth of Christianity, we should be able to reconstitute the vector leading from one to the other. A religious revolution entails a paradigm change: various elements that were expressed by a number of religious agents suddenly coalesce and their sum creates a new reality. Since Thomas Kuhn's seminal book on scientific revolutions, historians and philosophers of science have learned that the paradigm changes reflected in scientific revolutions do not appear *ex nihilo*, but rather are prepared by a number of smaller-scale changes effected by various agents. We should perhaps learn to approach religious revolutions in a similar way.[16]

I propose to call the religious transformations of late antiquity a *praeparatio coranica*, referring metaphorically to "The Evangelical Preparation" (*Praeparatio Evangelica*), the title of Eusebius of Caesarea's book on pagan pre-Christian Greek ideas, as having prepared, in a sense, the development of Christian concepts. This expression highlights the dramatic pace with which the new Islamic realm succeeded not only in conquering lands throughout the Near East, but also in converting populations (mainly, but not only, Christian).[17] This pace is not really explainable without taking into account the fact that some of the main traits of the Qur'an's message had not only been circulating for centuries, but to some extent had been internalized, becoming part of the religious and ethical ethos of late antique Christianity (and also Judaism). Prophecy, eschatological expectations, asceticism, fear of sin were all part and parcel of the late antique religious *koinē*.

What we have recently learned to call "the Abrahamic religions", which one referred to earlier as "the religions of the book" or the "monotheistic religions," are usually conceived as referring to, at least, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (the term itself is a modern plural rooted in the Qur'anic expression about *dīn Ibrāhīm*, "the religion [singular] of Abraham"). Although its emergence seems to be linked to contemporary efforts, mainly in Western Europe, to accept fast-growing Muslim minorities, it is rather convenient for referring to what one used to call "the monotheistic religions," as it highlights the genetic link between these families of religions.[18]

Actually, we should realize that in order to speak about "the Abrahamic religions," a plurality of two is enough. Indeed, Christian competition with Judaism in the first centuries is clearly modeled on Abraham's true inheritance, as a number of texts, from Justin Martyr to Eusebius of Caesarea, show. In many ways, emergent Islam reduplicated the model developed earlier by the Christians. The Christians considered themselves, from the first century on, to be the true sons and legitimate inheritors of Abraham, while the Jews had turned away from the core message of the forefather. Similarly, the Qur'an applied also to Christians the logic of the latter's argument against the Jews: both Jews and Christians have perverted the deep kernel of the true religion of Abraham, which the Qur'an reclaims.[19]

In many ways, one can hence conceive late antiquity as being the true crucible of the Abrahamic religions: it is in the polemics between Jews and Christians and in the Christian attitudes to a number of crucial religious problems that the conceptions that would soon become identified with Islam were forged. The emergence, mainly among Christians, but also among Jews, Zoroastrians, and dualists, of modes of thought that would be instrumental in permitting the rise of Islam, represents the *praeparatio coranica*.[20]

To some extent, the common perception of the Constantinian revolution may lead to a slanted understanding of the Christianization process in the Roman Empire. From J. B. Bury to Paul Veyne, a whole tradition of historiography insists on the imperial *fiat* which made Christianity into a *religio licita*, soon to be the preferred one, and eventually the only legitimate state religion. To Veyne's restatement of this approach in *Quand notre monde est devenu chrétien*, Marie-Françoise Baslez objected the following year, in a brilliant book, *Comment notre monde est devenu chrétien*.[21] Baslez describes how throughout the first three centuries, the Christian communities, originally close to the Qumran covenanters, gradually adopted different identities according to the various areas and cities of the Empire. She shows how, from the second to the fourth century, Christianity gradually became a religion of the book. For Baslez, explaining the Christianization of the Empire through a sudden and total conversion of Constantine remains unconvincing.

Despite this sobering approach, the leading paradigm in contemporary historiography of religion in late antiquity seems to remain that of the radical revolution. Following a recent fashion according to which *Ioudaismos* refers to geographical or ethnic, rather than religious identity, Daniel Boyarin, a scholar of rabbinic Judaism, has claimed that religion itself, as a concept, was invented in the fourth century CE.[22] Although Boyarin rightly detects a real mutation of the concept of religion in the fourth century, his claim is obviously quite odd, as if the Greeks, the Romans, or the Egyptians, had had only rituals, but no beliefs (I assume here that any definition of religion would include a mixture of words and deeds, of myths and rituals). For Boyarin, Constantine is thus in a sense the inventor of two religions, rabbinic Judaism side by side with Christianity. As in most far-fetched views, there is a kernel of truth in this vision of things. Namely, religion underwent, in the Roman Empire and throughout

the Mediterranean, a series of major changes, which do amount to a radical transformation.

The passage from paganism to Christianity, or from polytheism to monotheism, in late antiquity has been traditionally perceived as the major religious transformation of our period. Recent studies, however, have highlighted the important phenomenon of what is now commonly called “pagan monotheism” in late antiquity. It may be legitimate, therefore, to devote here some attention to what one can call the varieties of monotheism in late antiquity.[23]

II

Monotheism has now been with us for some time. The word “monotheism” itself, however, is relatively new, and appeared for the first time in English in 1660, in the Cambridge Platonist Henry More’s *Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness*. It gained currency in English only around 1750, later still entering German, French, and Italian.[24] It may be worth noticing the dramatic peak in the frequency of its use, in English at least, in the last decade of the nineteenth century.[25] This was in the heyday of the British Empire, when Victorian writers were puzzled by the flamboyance of Indian polytheistic traditions.

The question of monotheism can be asked from upstream (why one god rather than many?) or from downstream (why one god rather than none?). We usually seem to accept, at least implicitly, as a working hypothesis, that the number of gods declines steadily in human history, in a constant process of simplification. If so, then one god gets very close to no god at all. Were not the Jews called godless, *atheoi*, by Apollonius of Molon, in the first century BCE, as Josephus testifies?[26] This historical process of simplification can also be regarded as one of rationalization, and in a sense, this is what Max Weber referred to when speaking about the “disenchantment of the world” (*Entzauberung der Welt*). Rationalization means the constant simplification of the system of the universe, and hence the shrinking number, with time, of the divine powers in charge of it. In this paradigm, religious evolution usually takes place through revolution. In the ancient world Akhenaten, Zarathustra, and Nabonidus had tried, each in his own way, to insist on a dramatic simplification of the heavenly world: only one god was the true one, or the only one worthy of worship. Akhenaten’s “monotheism,” however, has also been described as a “cosmotheism,” while Nabonidus’s devotion to Sin, the moon god, may be more adequately described as henotheism.

The late nineteenth century saw the development of the historical and comparative study of religion as a new discipline, at the crossroads of theology and the humanities. Since then, various theories regarding the origin of monotheism have been propounded. For the Scottish polymath Andrew Lang, even some of the most “primitive” tribes believed in a high

god, the “All Father.” In the first half of the twentieth century, Lang’s theory, which was never widely accepted, was defended and developed by the Austrian anthropologist and Catholic priest Wilhelm Schmidt, who spoke of *Urmonotheismus*, in his massive *Der Ursprung der Gottesidee*, and by the Italian historian of religion Raffaele Pettazzoni.[27] In a sense, this approach, which rejected the above-mentioned paradigm of an evolution of religious ideas towards monotheism, represented a return to Paul’s views. For Paul, and not only for him, knowledge of the one God was present in the earliest stages of humankind, but became eventually blurred. Polytheism, in this view, represents a degeneration of monotheism: “and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles” (Rom 1: 23).[28]

According to the more commonly accepted scholarly trajectory, ancient Israel moved from polytheism to monotheism through henotheism. The traces of this trajectory, from the earliest biblical texts to the Second Isaiah, show a combination of evolution and revolution.[29] Scholarship has usually focused on the formation of the Hebrew Bible and the religious history of ancient Israel, on the early development of Christianity in the Roman Empire,[30] and on the emergence of Islam at the very end of late antiquity. For the French Semitist Ernest Renan, around the mid-nineteenth century, monotheism was the single significant contribution of the Semites to humankind. In his view, from India to Europe, the Aryan peoples lived in countries where the lushness of nature (mountains, rivers, forests) fed creative imagination in all fields, from literature, arts, and sciences to politics. The minds and sensitivities of the Semites, on the other hand, suffered from the poverty and emptiness of their natural habitat. Only one idea could be born in the desert, that of the one, solitary God.[31] “Le désert est monothéiste,” would claim Renan. The great inventors of monotheism were the Israelite prophets. They were also the predecessors of Jesus, whom Renan calls “a man so great that one might even call him God” (a sentence which cost him the chair at the Collège de France to which he had just been elected). Islam, for Renan the last great religious invention of humankind, was for him also the weakest, as it represented the least attractive kind of monotheistic religion imaginable.[32] The spiritual poverty of Islam explained for Renan the fundamental failure of Islamic societies to modernize and to accept the challenges of modern science.[33]

Renan's bleak vision of Islamic monotheism reflects a deeply ingrained ambivalence on the part of many scholars stemming from a Christian background: in their view there had been a steady progression in the refinement of religious ideas from ancient Israel to Christ. From Jesus to Muhammad, however, there could only be regression. For them, the fact that Islamic monotheism seemed so pure actually reflected its inherent poverty and a lack of sophistication.

The long late antiquity, between, more or less, the birth of Christianity and that of Islam, represents a crucial period in the history of religion. During this period, monotheism eventually became "the politically correct religious idiom."[34] In the last two decades, there has been mounting recognition of the importance of monotheistic trends among Hellenic thinkers under the Roman Empire.[35] For Platonic philosophers, in particular, the pyramid of beings culminated in the One, the supreme god. Whether references to *Hypsistos Theos* (the Highest God), or exclamatory lapidary inscriptions like *Heis Theos!* (One God!) stem from Jewish, Christian, or pagan milieus is still being discussed.[36] In the present context, however, we need to point out the obvious, that is, that this pagan monotheism is a far cry from Abrahamic monotheism, either of the Jewish or of the Christian persuasion. Whether the Roman world was moving towards monotheism (or at least towards henotheism), and whether this reflected Jewish or Christian prodding, as it were, we cannot know for sure. What is certain is the conflation of Greek and Israelite forms of monotheism in the Roman Empire. Late antique religion can be described as an intercultural system in which a dynamic process permitted the transformation of religious conceptualization and practice.[37]

Scholarly tradition follows cultural habits, inherited from Christianity, in considering monotheism as the motor of religious change in late antiquity: it is perceived as being at the very core of the great clash between pagans and Christians. Scholarly tradition, however, focuses on discourse rather than on practice, and may not take ancient perceptions sufficiently into account. For Augustine, for instance, it is forms of worship, rather than theological conceptions, that are the main criterion of religious identity.[38] Similarly, Emperor Julian writes: "…I wish to show that the Jews agree with the Gentiles (*tois ethnesin*), except that they believe in only one God. That is indeed peculiar to them and strange to us, since all the rest we have

in a manner in common with them – temples, sanctuaries, altars, purifications, and certain precepts. For as to these we differ from one another either not at all or in trivial matters."[39] Julian rejected the Christian God of his youth, and sought to return to Hellenic tradition. He never quite succeeded, however, in becoming a real polytheist, and his arguments against the "Galileans" reveal him to have remained, at heart, a monotheist. What he reproaches the God of Moses for is not so much his uniqueness as his character: he is jealous (*baskanos*).[40] He is, moreover, "a particular (*merikon*) god," while the Hellenes know to "recognize the God of the All" (*ton tōn holōn theon*).[41] God does not need Revelation in order for humans to recognize him, since "the human race possesses its knowledge of God by nature and not from teaching," a fact proved "by the universal yearning for the divine that is in all men."[42] Even for as loud an advocate of polytheism as the Platonist philosopher Proclus, a century later, "all forms of religions and sects accept the existence of the very first cause, and all men call it a helping god," while not all recognize the existence of lower gods, as "The One shows itself with more evidence than plurality."[43]

While pagans were sometimes not real polytheists, Christians often seemed to believe in more than one god—an accusation common in Jewish and Muslim anti-Christian polemics through the ages. I refer here not so much to the Trinity, a belief that was not universal among Christians before the fourth century, but to the hierarchy of two divine beings, God the Father and Jesus Christ. Let me quote here at some length a striking passage from Origen's *Dialogue with Heraclides*, a work written in the 240s, relating a theological discussion between bishops:

> ORIGEN SAID: I beg you, Father Heraclides: there is a God who is all-powerful, uncreated, the supreme God who made all things. Do you agree?
>
> HERACLIDES SAID: I agree; this is what I too believe.
>
> ORIGEN SAID: Christ Jesus existing in the form of God, and distinct from the God in the form of whom he existed, was God before his incarnation, yes or no?
>
> HERACLIDES SAID: He was God before.
>
> ORIGEN SAID: Was he God before His incarnation, yes or no?
>
> HERACLIDES SAID: Yes.
>
> ORIGEN SAID: Another God [*heteros theos*] than the God in whose form He Himself was?
>
> HERACLIDES SAID: Of course, different from another one, and as He was in the form of the Creator of all.

ORIGEN SAID: Isn't it true, then, that there was a God, Son of God, who is the single Son of God, the first born of all creation, and that we have no trouble in saying both that there are two Gods (*duo theous*), and that there is one God?

[…]

ORIGEN SAID: You do not seem to have answered my question. Explain yourself better, as perhaps I have not understood well. Is the Father God?

HERACLIDES SAID: Indeed.

ORIGEN SAID: Is the Son distinct from the Father?

HERACLIDES SAID: Of course. How could one be at once father and son?

ORIGEN SAID: While being distinct from the Father, is the Son, too, God?

HERACLIDES SAID: He too is God.

ORIGEN SAID: And the unity that is being established is that of two Gods?

HERACLIDES SAID: Yes.

ORIGEN SAID: Do we profess two Gods (*homologoumen duo theous*)?

HERACLIDES SAID: Yes. The power (*dunamis*) is one.[44]

This striking dialog, which Islamicists may find quaintly reminiscent of a Kalam argument, may well be the best proof text in all of Patristic literature showing that the doctrine of the Trinity is inescapably polytheistic.[45] It clearly reflects the complicated way in which third-century Christian intellectuals grappled with their theology, a way whose definition as strict monotheism may seem questionable to the outsider. The hierarchical or "vertical" dualism, integrating two divine persons in the Godhead, was not really a Christian invention. Since Hellenistic times, a number of Jewish, usually apocryphal texts had referred to a second divine figure, next to God and beneath Him, Enoch being probably the most common such figure. The same dualistic structure of the Divinity was retained in a number of traditions from the rabbinic period, usually centered on the figure of Metatron ("he who sits near the Divine throne"?) or of another archangel. Various rabbinic sources mention that there are "two Powers in heaven" (*shtei rashuyot ba-shammayim*).[46] Such traditions, complex as they are, have of course been studied, but it may be fair to say that the significant split in the Divinity that they reflect has not always been appreciated enough. Not unsurprisingly, scholars have often been loath to recognize dualistic trends within "orthodox" Judaism, which claimed to retain the purity of monotheism while confronting Christian "bitheism," or at least "binarian" monotheism. One may postulate that the existence of

Christianity is what restrained the development of such hierarchies within the divine world in late antique rabbinic literature.[47]

It is probably the presence of all the different kinds of dualist heresies, which we usually refer to, globally, as Gnosticism, that has prevented a more precise scholarly diagnostic about the existence of a dualism within biblical monotheism in general, and Christian theology in particular. Like the rabbis, the church fathers insisted upon the dualist nature of many of the heresies they were fighting, whitewashing the dualist proclivities inherent to their own belief system. On the other hand, Christian apologists wished to give the impression that they had a monopoly on monotheism. To a great extent, modern scholarship has accepted this emic perception of things.

I cannot offer here even a schematic taxonomy of Gnostic dualism. Suffice it to note that the sources offer a number of different conceptions of dualism. In his *Epistle to Flora*, Ptolemy, a second-century disciple of Valentinus, offers an introduction of sorts to Gnostic doctrine, in which the material world was created by the demiurge, a god lower than the perfect and highest God, who is the Father of Jesus Christ. While the Father is good (or merciful), the demiurge is only just (or strict)—but he is not evil by nature. Similarly, the arch-heretic Marcion, in the mid-second century, claims the God of the Old Testament, the demiurge, is lower than the Good God, but he does not quite demonize him. The only strict and radical dualism emerging from the biblical tradition would be that of Manichaeism, starting in the mid-third century. For Mani, who had grown up among the Elchasaites, a sect of Jewish-Christian Baptists, hierarchical dualism became a dualism of strict opposition. The Good and spiritual God confronted the Evil and material Devil, each with his own kingdom, and with his own troops, the sons of light fighting the sons of darkness. Such a radical dualism recalls the strong dualistic structure of some of the Dead Sea Scrolls (reflected for instance in the war between the sons of light and the sons of darkness). It stands to reason that in both cases this “horizontal” dualism originated in Iran. But even in Manichaeism, the balance is tipped, and the final result of the grand battle between the King of Light and the Prince of Darkness is known in advance: the forces of good will win, those of evil will be defeated forever.[48]

The ubiquity of dualist proclivities in various forms of late antique monotheism calls for an explanation. If it seems that a dualist tension is inherent to biblical monotheism, it is because this monotheism (in

contradistinction to pagan monotheism) insists on the ethical aspect of God, and seeks to offer a theodicy: *Unde malum?* (Whence Evil?) is a major question that cannot be avoided. I propose to see in the centrality of the ethical dimension a core component of the Abrahamic religions, perhaps even more significant than the simple idea of God's unity. The Islamicist Henry Corbin has called the necessity for the One to become multiple in order to be worshipped "the paradox of monotheism."[49] There is indeed a paradox inherent to monotheism, different from the so-called "omnipotence paradox" addressed by Averroes. Monotheism entails the propensity of a split in the divine, transcendent unity. This split can take one of the many forms of dualism and trinitarianism. Angelology, other divine hierarchies, and anthropomorphism should also be perceived as related to this paradox.

As we have seen, then, late antique Jewish, Christian, Gnostic, and pagan forms of monotheism were never simply "pure." Similarly, in both Manichaeism and Sasanian Zoroastrianism, dualism was never total. Within the latter, moreover, the Zurvanian heresy represents a clear attempt to move from a dualist to a monist worldview.[50] When pagans converted to Christianity, it is probably not the desire to confess God's unity that mainly moved them. If pagan monotheism failed, writes Gillian Clark, it is because it was at once too exclusive (its teachings were accessible to few) and too inclusive (it did not prohibit the cult of the gods).

Indeed, pagan monotheism eventually failed, but it would be a mistake to think that there was only one possible trajectory in late antiquity. Marinus of Neapolis (the ancient Shechem and the modern Nablus, in Samaria) was the successor of Proclus as the head of the Athenian Academy. His disciple Damascius reports that "born a Samaritan, Marinus renounced their creed [*doxan*] (which is anyway a deviation [*kainotomian*] from Abraham's religion [*thrēskeias*]) and embraced Hellenism."[51]

Such a text highlights the fact that Abraham was perceived as a culture hero of sorts much beyond Jewish and Christian communities. As students of Islamic origins have long known, some sources—few, but significant—tell us about "Abrahamic" traditions, and festivals, crossing the boundaries of traditional religious communities. In late antiquity, both Jews and Christians claimed, of course, to be the only true followers of Abraham's true religion. The Qur'an's claims about Jews and Christians having departed, in different ways, from Abraham's pure inheritance, seem to apply to Christians the same accusation that early Christians had hurled at

Jews, namely that they had perverted Abraham's true religion.[52] Abraham's religion, indeed, was in late antiquity broadly perceived as true monotheism —almost as natural religion.[53]

Recent research has detected, since at least the late fourth century, a significant monotheist presence in the Western Arabian peninsula, from the Hejaz to the Yemen, beyond the Jewish and Christian communities. Although we do not know the precise nature of this monotheism, it appears to have had what one could call a Jewish "flavor."[54] Hence, when we speak, as is becoming increasingly fashionable, of the Qur'an as a "late antique text," we ought to remember that it is a very specific kind of late antiquity that is referred to here: that of Abrahamic religions, not that of Hellenic *paideia*.[55] Both Gerald Hawting and Patricia Crone have argued that the *mushrikūn* of the Qur'an (literally "those who associate" [another divine figure with the One God]), were monotheists rather than polytheists, as was traditionally argued.[56] The gist of my brief presentation would seem to corroborate, to some extent, their argument: *Shirk* seems to lie at the very heart of monotheism.

Monotheism comes in different shapes and colors, and it almost never comes pure. Like all religious systems, it remains essentially unstable; it is given to permanent evolution and sometimes to radical transformation. Late antique Abrahamic monotheism was either universalist—Christianity and Islam, or particularist—Judaism. For Christians as well as for Muslims, the same religious truth is to be shared by all humanity—all individuals and all peoples. Jews, on the other hand, thrived through the ages on the paradox of a universal God and a chosen people. Early on, the God of Israel had entered into a contractual relationship with his people, Abraham's true offspring, transformed by the covenant into a priestly nation and a saintly people. While their national God soon became universal, the Jews insisted in retaining, through the ages, their national identity.

Abrahamic monotheism has some far-reaching implications, also on the political level. The German Catholic theologian Erik Peterson had argued as much in *Monotheismus als politisches Problem*, a seminal book published in 1935, written with the intention of fighting the perverse uses of Christianity in Nazi Germany. Another German scholar, the Egyptologist and historian of religion Jan Assmann, has recently caused stormy polemical waves with what he calls "the Mosaic distinction," a concept he

first developed in *Moses the Egyptian* (1998).[57] According to Assmann, the Hebrew Bible proposed a new conception of religion, unknown to the archaic world, according to which religion is essentially a matter of truth, rather than of tradition. For Assmann, it is the traditions embedded in the Hebrew Bible that lie at the roots of religious intolerance and violence in the Western world. Assmann's views have brought him some virulent criticism, as well as misplaced accusations of anti-Semitism. In an article published recently in the *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, Assmann has responded to this criticism, noting that in contradistinction to Christianity and Islam, rabbinic Judaism is not guilty of religious intolerance.[58] For the rabbis, the seven Noachide commandments imposed by God upon all humankind except the Israelites permitted all men (and women) to lead a saintly life without converting to Judaism. If the particularist form of monotheism professed by the rabbis does not fit the intolerant character of other monotheisms, I should like to suggest that it may well be because this intolerant character does not belong to monotheism per se, but only to *universalist* forms of monotheism.

For Renan, as we saw, Islam was the latest, and the least, of the Abrahamic religions. The Hungarian Jewish scholar Ignaz Goldziher, who was probably the most impressive modern student of Islam, strongly objected to Renan. The young Goldziher had contemplated converting to Islam. It was in the hope of seeing Judaism raise itself to the high spiritual and moral level of Islam that he eventually decided not to do so.

In this introduction, I have sought to present, in a rather impressionistic way, a series of examples showing how ancient Christianity must also be understood from the viewpoint of the history of religions in late antiquity. Prophecy runs like a thread from Jesus to Muhammad. And yet, this thread, arguably the single most important characteristic of the Abrahamic movement, often remains outside the mainstream, hidden, as it were, since it generates heresy. The figures of the Gnostic, the holy man, and the mystic are all sequels of the Israelite prophet. They reflect a mode of religiosity which is characterized by high intensity. It is centrifugal by nature and emphasizes sectarianism and polemics, esoteric knowledge, or *gnōsis* and charisma. The other mode of religiosity, obviously much more common than the first one, is centripetal. It favors an ecumenical attitude, contents itself with a widely shared faith, or *pistis*, and reflects, in Weberian parlance, the routinization of the new religious movement. This is the mode

of priests and bishops, rather than that of martyrs and holy men. These two main modes of religiosity, high versus low intensity, exist simultaneously, and cross the boundaries of religious communities. They offer a tool permitting us to follow the transformations of religion in late antiquity in general, and in ancient Christianity in particular, without becoming prisoners of the traditional categories of Patristic literature. Through the dialectical relationship between these two modes of religiosity, one can follow the complex transformations of ancient Christianity in its broad religious context.

Christianity, which had started as a Jewish heresy, soon turned the tables and made the Jews into the first Christian heretics, who had rejected the correct understanding of their own scriptures. This transformation would be completed in the sixth century with Justinian's legal measures, which transformed the Jews into a community (or more precisely, a web of communities) of tolerated heretics. The "cunning of reason," to use Hegel's pregnant coining, would then see the early Muslims apply this approach to the Christians themselves. Under the Caliphate, the Christians would also become a community (or a web of communities) of tolerated heretics, who, like the Jews, had purposefully distorted the one, true message of God, first proclaimed by Abraham and last retrieved by Muhammad.

Part I of this book will seek to identify some of the major transformations of religion in late antiquity, beyond the boundaries of traditional religious communities. It will focus on the implications of the progressive disappearance of blood sacrifices and will ask whether we may speak of "patterns of rationalization" in the various forms of late antique religiosity. Part II will deal with the perception of prophecy in late antique Christianity. In particular, we shall analyze the concept of "false prophecy" in contexts of heightened eschatological expectations, for instance, in the early seventh century, as well as that of "Seal of Prophecy" as it appears already in early Manichaean traditions. My contention is that, in parallel to the formation of orthodoxies, major underground currents kept alive the revolutionary and centrifugal power of prophecy in late antique religion. Part III will study aspects of the complex relationship between Jews and Christians in late antiquity. It will also reflect upon the new perceptions of political power in a monotheistic climate. Finally, Part IV will highlight the interplay of some of the themes studied here with the coming of Islam.

The four parts, then, seek to follow the trajectory of some major themes in late antique religion up to the emergence of Islam. Obviously, many themes of importance could not be dealt with here. I am thinking, in particular, about early Christian Docetism, a conception which reappears in the Qur'an, and about aspects of Christian martyrdom in the Roman Empire, which bear upon the early Islamic idea of martyrdom. The evolution and interplay of mystical traditions among Jews and Christians, in particular the vision of God, too, and their impact upon early Islamic conceptions, again, could not be dealt directly here. It is my belief, however, that these would not have altered in major ways the kind of trajectory delineated in this essay.

[1] For a panoramic vision of the perception of nascent Islam by contemporary Christians, see James Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[2] The book was published by Cambridge University Press in 2012.

[3] On this concept, see Vincianne Pirenne-Delforge and John Scheid, "Qu'est-ce qu'une mutation religieuse?" in Laurent Bricault and Corinne Bonnet, eds, *Panthée: Religious Transformations in the Graeco-Roman Empire*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World, 177 (Leiden and Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2013), pp. 309–13.

[4] See Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds, *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

[5] See Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[6] For a work of *haute vulgarisation* describing the different religious worlds of the late antique Near East up to the coming of Islam, see Tom Holland, *In the Shadow of the Sword: The Battle for Global Empire and the End of an Ancient World* (London: Little, Brown, 2012).

[7] On the use of "lab" for describing the emergence of various theological schools in Early Christianity, see Winrich Löhr, "Epiphanes, Schrift *Peri dikaiosynēs* (= Clemens Alexandrinus, Str. III,6,1–9,3)," in *Logos: Festschrift für Luise Abramowski*, ed. Hanns Christof Brennecke, Ernst Ludwig Grasmück, and Christoph Markschies, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche, Bd 67 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1993), pp. 12–29.

[8] See for instance ch. 6 "Religious Dynamics between Jews and Christians".

[9] Cicero was quoting Thales of Miletus. Cf. Keith Hopkins, *A World Full of Gods: The Strange Triumph of Christianity* (New York: Plume, 2001).

[10] See Albert I. Baumgarten, *The Flourishing of Jewish Sects in the Maccabean Era: An Interpretation*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, 55 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005).

[11] The literature is of course immense. For two classics, see Géza Vermès, *Jesus and the World of Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1983) and E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996).

[12] See for instance Simon Claude Mimouni, *Le Judéo-christianisme ancien: Essais historiques*, Patrimoines (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1998).

[13] See for instance ch. 8 “Jewish-Christians and Islamic Origins”.

[14] John E. Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1978).

[15] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in Connected History: From the Tagus to the Ganges*, Oxford India Paperbacks (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), as well as Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in Connected History: Mughals and Franks*, Oxford India Paperbacks (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[16] See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4th ed. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012). What the anthropologist Dan Sperber has called, together with the psychologist Deirdre Wilson, the “epidemiology of representations” might prove here a useful conception. See Dan Sperber, “Anthropology and Psychology: Towards an Epidemiology of Representations,” *Man*, n.s., 20 (1985), 73–89. Sperber researches the ways through which micro-processes of cultural transmission affect the macro-structure of culture, its contents, and its evolution. In other words, he asks how social phenomena relate to psychological, mental phenomena. For our part, we should ask how both theologoumena and modes of religiosity are transformed in history. See ch. 2 “Patterns of Rationalization”.

[17] For an authoritative overview of the Islamic conquests, see Hugh Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests: How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live In* (Philadelphia: Da Capo, 2007).

[18] For a different assessment of the heuristic usefulness of “Abrahamic religions,” see Aaron W. Hughes, *Abrahamic Religions: On the Uses and Abuses of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), as well as Jon Douglas Levenson, *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012). For Hughes, the origins of the term in interfaith discourse prevent its use for the scholarly study of religions, while Levinson’s reticence to see Islam as a full participant in the tradition originating in the Hebrew Bible strikes me as theologically oriented.

[19] On the concept of the Abrahamic religions, see Guy G. Stroumsa, “From Abraham’s Religion to the Abrahamic Religions,” *Historia Religionum*, 3 (2011), 11–22.

[20] See “Envoi: Athens, Jerusalem, Mecca: *praeparatio coranica*.” For a detailed historical study of the conflict between empires in the late antique Near East, see Peter Sarris, *Empires of Faith: The Fall of Rome to the Rise of Islam, 500–700*, Oxford History of Medieval Europe (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[21] Paul Veyne, *Quand notre monde est devenu chrétien, (312–394)*, Bibliothèque Albin Michel. Idées (Paris: Albin Michel, 2007). Marie-Françoise Baslez, *Comment notre monde est devenu chrétien* (Paris: Points, 2011).

On patterns of Christianization, see Hervé Inglebert, Sylvain Destephen, and Bruno Dumézil, eds, *Le Problème de la christianisation du monde antique*, Textes, Images et Monuments de l’Antiquité au haut Moyen Âge, 10 (Paris: Picard, 2010).

[22] Boyarin has expressed his views in a number of essays. See in particular Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, Divinations (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

[23] In a slightly different form, the following remarks were presented at a panel at the University of Bergen, on June 3, 2014 on the occasion of the award of the Holberg Prize to Michael Cook.

[24] I quote here Michael Frede, "The Case for Pagan Monotheism in Greek and Greco-Roman Antiquity," in *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire*, ed. Stephen Mitchell and Peter van Nuffelen (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 53–81 (pp. 59–60).

[25] Thanks to Google's Ngram (https://books.google.com/ngrams).

[26] *Contra Apionem* II, 148; similar reference to the Jews' "atheism" (*atheotēs*) in Julian, "Against the Galileans," in *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, vol. 3, trans. by Wilmer C. Wright, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1923), pp. 320–1.

[27] W. Schmidt, *Der Ursprung der Gottesidee: Eine historisch-kritische und positive Studie*, 12 vols (Münster: Aschendorff, 1926–55); R. Pettazzoni, *Dio: Formazione e sviluppo del monoteismo nella storia delle religioni, vol. 1: L'essere celeste nelle credenze dei popoli primitivi* (Rome: Athenaeum, 1922).

[28] Rom. 1: 23; cf. similar views in Islamic historiography.

[29] On biblical monotheism, see for instance Fritz Stolz, *Einfūhrung in den biblischen Monotheismus* (Darmstadt: Wisssenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996).

[30] See for instance Loren T. Stuckenbruck and Wendy E. S. North, eds, *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism* (London and New York: T. & T. Clark, 2004), with a select bibliography pp. 235–42.

[31] Throughout his career, Renan expressed such ideas in a number of places. See for instance his Inaugural Lecture at the Collège de France (1862), *De la part des peuples sémitiques dans l'histoire de la civilisation* (Paris: Lévy, 1862).

[32] Ernest Renan, "Mahomet et les origines de l'islamisme," in *Études d'histoire religieuse*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), pp. 168–220.

[33] See Ernest Renan, *L'Islamisme et la science: Conférence faite à la Sorbonne, le 29 mars 1883* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1883).

[34] See Hopkins, *A World Full of Gods*. The expression is from Polymnia Athanassiadi, "From Man to God, or the Mutation of a Culture (300 B.C.–A.D. 762)," in *Heaven and Earth: Art of Byzantium from Greek Collections*, ed. Anastasia Drandakē, Dēmētra Papanikola-Mpakirtzē, and Anastasia G. Turta (Athens: Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports, 2013), pp. 28–43.

[35] See in particular three important collections of studies: Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede, *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Stephen Mitchell and Peter van Nuffelen, eds, *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Stephen Mitchell and Peter van Nuffelen, *Monotheism between Pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity* (Leuven and Walpole, Mass.: Peeters, 2010). For a critique of the concept of pagan monotheism, see M. Edwards, "Pagan and Christian Monotheism in the Age of Constantine," in *Approaching Late Antiquity: The Transformation from Early to Late Empire*, ed. Simon Swain and Mark Edwards (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 211–34. See further Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, *Dio unico,*

pluralità e monarchia divina: Esperienze religiose e teologie nel mondo tardo-antico (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2010).

[36] See for instance Stephen Mitchell, "Further Thoughts on the Cult of Theos Hypsistos," in Mitchell and van Nuffelen, eds, *One God*, 167–208. See further Nicole Belayche, "Hypsistos: Une voie de l'exaltation des dieux dans le polythéisme gréco-romain," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 7 (2005), 34–55.

[37] Cf. Beate Pongratz-Leisten, in her introduction to *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2011), p. 38.

[38] Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, 10.1, quoted by Alfons Fürst, "Monotheism between Cult and Politics: The Themes of the Ancient Debate between Pagan and Christian Monotheism," in *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire*, ed. Stephen Mitchell and Peter van Nuffelen (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 82–100 (p. 85).

[39] *Contra Galileos*, 306B, (pp. 406–7 LCL).

[40] *C. Gal.* 93C, (pp. 326–7 LCL); translation emended.

[41] *C. Gal.* 148C, (pp. 358–9 LCL); translation emended.

[42] *C. Gal.* 52B, (pp. 320–1 LCL).

[43] *In Tim.* III; Diels 153, 6–15, Festugière IV, 195.

[44] *Entretien d'Origène avec Héraclide*, ed. & trans. Jean Scherer, Sources Chrétiennes, 67 (Paris: Cerf, 1967). I. 20–II. 20; pp. 54–9.

[45] I wish to thank Mark Edwards for this statement.

[46] The classic study is Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden and Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2002).

[47] See for instance Menachem Kister, "Some Early Jewish and Christian Exegetical Problems and the Dynamics of Monotheism," *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, 37 (2006), 548–93.

[48] See for instance Guy G. Stroumsa, "Le Roi et le porc: De la structure du dualisme manichéen," in Guy G. Stroumsa, *Savoir et salut* (Paris: Cerf, 1992), pp. 243–58.

[49] See Henry Corbin, *Le Paradoxe du monothéisme* (Paris: l'Herne, 1981), p. 181: "Le monothéisme est impossible sans l'angélologie."

[50] On Sasanian dualism, see in particular Shaul Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation: Varieties of Religion in Sasanian Iran* (London: SOAS, 1994). See also Shaul Shaked, "Some Notes on Ahreman, the Evil Spirit, and His Creation," in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion presented to Gershom G. Scholem on his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Ephraim E. Urbach, R. J. Z. Werblowsky, and C. Wirszubski (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), pp. 227–34.

[51] See Damascius, *The Philosophical History*, ed. and trans. Polymnia Athanassiadi (Athens: Apameia, 1999), pp. 236–7.

[52] See for instance Justin Martyr's *Dialog with Trypho the Jew*, a text redacted before the mid-second century.

[53] See Stroumsa, "From Abraham's Religion to the Abrahamic Religions."

[54] See for instance Iwona Gadja, “Quel monothéisme en Arabie du sud ancienne?,” in *Juifs et chrétiens en Arabie aux Ve et VIe siècles: Regards croisés sur les sources*, ed. Joëlle Beaucamp, Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet, and C. J. Robin (Paris: Association des amis du Centre d’histoire et de civilisation de Byzance, 2010), pp. 107–20.

[55] See Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike: Ein europäischer Zugang* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2010).

[56] Gerald R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Patricia Crone, “The Religion of the Qur’ānic Pagans: God and the Lesser Deities,” *Arabica*, 57 (2010), 151–200.

[57] See in particular Jan Assmann, *Die mosaische Unterscheidung, oder, Der Preis des Monotheismus* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 2003).

[58] Jan Assmann, “Autour de l’Exode: Monothéisme, différence et violence,” *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions*, 231 (2014), 5–26.

Part I

Transformations of Religion in Late Antiquity

The End of Sacrifice

For the historian of religions, the end of animal sacrifices as the centerpiece of public religion is certainly one of the most important problems at the end of the ancient world. Indeed, early Christian attitudes to animal sacrifices have attracted considerable scholarly attention of late, in a number of books. The main problem with most of these works, however, is their almost exclusive focus upon Christianity, while ignoring rabbinic Judaism, a religion born concomitantly with Christianity, and from the very same roots, the Second Temple version of the religion of biblical Israel. From a methodological perspective, such an approach is seriously mistaken, as what obtains in Judaism may give us some important clues as to the more general trend in late antique religion. The profound transformations of religion in late antiquity, throughout the Mediterranean and the Near East, have brought some scholars to propose seeing in late antiquity a new “axial age”—using the concept popularized by the German philosopher Karl Jaspers.

I

At the onset of *The Origin and Goal of History* (*Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*),[1] the German philosopher Karl Jaspers highlighted the fact, already noticed in the eighteenth century, that approximately around the mid-first millennium BCE, a series of exceptional figures appeared in a number of civilizations, which had a dramatic impact on thought and religion. Confucius and Mencius in China, the Buddha in India, Zarathustra in Iran, the prophets of Israel, and the Ionian Presocratic philosophers all transformed the cultures in which they were born in radical ways. (Zarathustra's dates are anything but certain. He may well have preceded the axial age by a few hundred years.) Jaspers was fascinated by this seeming synchrony, which he could not really explain. For Jaspers, the axial age constituted the great divide in human history. Civilizations before and after it were different in some fundamental ways. In Jaspers' perception, civilizations that had no obvious contacts between them underwent, at more or less the same time, which he called *Achsenzeit* (axial age), a spiritual "quantum leap" which introduced self-consciousness and gave an ethical dimension to myths and to the perception of the universe. Through the spiritualization that this transformation involved, the axial age established the grounds on which the great historical religious and intellectual traditions emerged. In 1975, Jaspers' insight was picked up, as it were, by the participants of a special issue of *Dedalus*, the journal of the American Academy of Sciences, edited by the American Sinologist Benjamin Schwartz. The interest in the axial age gathered momentum with *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), a book edited by the leading Israeli sociologist Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt.[2] The current trendiness of the axial age is perhaps best highlighted by the publication, in 2006, of Karen Armstrong's *The Great Transformation: The Beginnings of Our Religious Traditions*. More recently, the late sociologist of religion Robert Bellah published his magnum opus, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2011). In this book, he dealt successively, with the civilizations of Israel, Greece, China, and India around the middle of the first millennium BCE. Bellah's study of the

transformation of religion in the axial age in his last book had been anticipated by a seminal article.[3]

The idea of the axial age, with its undertones of a scholarly approach emphasizing the spiritual unity of humankind and deep similarity between the "great civilizations" and their intellectual and spiritual heroes is easily seductive. According to Eisenstadt, the main axial transformation was the birth of cultural "reflexivity" and of "second order thought." Thanks to the chasm that had opened between the heavenly world and the human realm, axial-age cultures learned to express discursively their own cosmology and anthropology. This chasm also had another impact on religion, which now entailed a demand for salvation.

Eisenstadt and Bellah saw themselves as walking in Weber's footsteps when they sought to compare ancient civilizations. Weber's Sisyphean attempt at highlighting the main articulations of societies, economics, and religious views, from a comparative perspective, an attempt that was cut short by his death in 1920, remains to this day the most impressive and sustained effort to analyze religions in the context of the different societies in which they were born and grew, and the dialectical relationship between religion, economy, and society.

Like Durkheim, Bellah conceives the stages of religious development as following the evolution of societies moving from the less to the more complex. This Durkheimian trope is compounded by a Darwinian one: human evolution also belongs to the evolution of a species. Societies move from the simplest structures (the tribe) in the early stages of human history to more and more complex ones: the city, the early state, the empire. The transformations of society are accompanied by transformations of ritual and myth, of religion. "As societies became more complex, religions followed suit," writes Bellah, indicating that such transformations are not linear. They are mainly accomplished through mutations, radical structural changes which appear to be the answer to crises and challenges. The axial age, he argues, witnessed a major crisis in the ritual system, as people stopped believing in the system's efficacy. Bellah can thus speak about a burst of "anti-ritualism," and of "demythologization" (Bellah uses here, in a new fashion, a concept coined by the theologian Rudolph Bultmann, referring to the mental activity necessary for a modern apprehension of the New Testament). To be sure, anti-ritualism does not entail the end of ritual, anymore than demythologization means the end of myth. It does point,

however, to a new, critical attitude to traditional ritual, as well as to the new central importance of ethics in religion—hence, the new universal dimension of religion. It is only with the break of former ritual systems that major breakthroughs could open new vistas in religious attitudes and beliefs.

The fascination with the axial age reflects the similarity of intellectual and spiritual trends and culture heroes, across civilizations seemingly unrelated. This concept is a perfect antidote to accusations of Europeocentrism in an age of globalization. The problem is that the axial age seems to be a *fata morgana*. The riddle of synchrony, as Jan Assmann has argued, evaporates at the mention of Akhenaten, Jesus, or Muhammad, who should obviously belong to the club of "axial" figures together with Socrates, Isaiah, or Zarathustra. While it sometimes happens that different cultures reach a similar turning point at approximately the same point in time, what really counts, in each case, is the cause (or causes) of this turning point. Moreover, the obvious possibility of diffusionism should be entertained: if chariots and goods could move so easily, ideas could too. But religious change can also be brought about by new technologies. The clearest case is probably that of the emergence and diffusion of script systems. The development of writing, which is directly related to the establishment of empires and huge, centralized societies, entailed the need, for the literate elites, to educate and train new generations of scribes, and eventually the redaction of books, and hence of holy texts, which often remained esoteric, not to be divulged to all and sundry. Religion inscribed in a book has become a portable religion, one that can and will travel. On various occasions in his book, Bellah points to the crucial importance of writing in the evolution of cultures, but fails to grant the topic all the focused attention it requires.

The concept of axial age, then, is misleading. Rather than focusing on one epoch when everything, everywhere, tipped over, it is probably wiser to identify major cultural changes, whenever they happen. New configurations of culture and their social consequences are just as interesting as new configurations of society and their cultural consequences. We are the recipients of the double legacy of Greece and Israel. This may very well be the case, but it is only through the major intellectual remodeling effected by the church fathers (and before them by Philo of Alexandria) and of the

medieval Scholastic theologians (who could read Aristotle mostly thanks to the Arabs!) that these two legacies were integrated.

Religions should be studied in their different societal and cultural contexts. If there is no single *homo religiosus*, from all times and all cultures, as the phenomenology of Mircea Eliade wanted us to believe, that does not mean that there is no common ground between the rituals and myths of all nations. And if the axial age proves to be an illusion, that does not mean that religions, like societies, do not undergo at some turning points in history some major transformations, or even mutations. Analyzing such mutations in a comparative perspective, dismantling their inner mechanisms, is not merely possible. It is the key to a better understanding of the very nature of religious revolutions, past and present.

The challenge is how to dissolve false categories without giving up on the grand ambition to find laws; that is, to retain the principle of unity beyond diversity—and what else is science, what else is scholarship? If the idea of the axial age fails to convince, it is not because there is "nothing in it," but because it is less unique and less universal than it claims to be. Rather than one single axial age, one might then prefer to speak of a number of axial periods, in each cultural "ecosystem"—while it is possible, of course, to identify also some synchronic similarities between different cultural ecosystems. The longer late antiquity, for example, is such a period for the cultures of the Near East and of the Mediterranean. From Jesus to Muhammad, a series of religious movements (together with the Christians, one should mention, at least, the rabbinic Jews, Gnostics, Manichaeans, and Mandaeans) insist on the redaction and preservation of holy, revealed books. These books, which are often learned by heart, at least in part, are commented upon, sometimes translated, often sung during ritual. One can speak of a "scriptural movement" in the late antique Near East and Eastern Mediterranean. It is essential to understand how this new role played by books will soon transform the religious systems of the area, ushering in new configurations from the old building blocks. These new religious configurations, namely Eastern and Western Christendom, as well as the Islamic Caliphate, will soon form an "eco-system," which will endure throughout the Middle Ages. And since in late antiquity the religion of biblical Israel underwent a series of dramatic transformations with the rabbis, it is what we have recently learned to call the Abrahamic religions that the axial age" ignores. In this "ecosystem," religious and cultural trends

will constantly circulate and evolve, creating the basis of our world. These reflections on the idea of an axial age are meant to cool unleashed enthusiasm, as tempting as it may be, for seeing in late antiquity, or in any other given period, a time of dramatic cultural, intellectual, and religious transformation in many highly different societies. Hence, the following pages do not claim a global heuristic value, beyond the Mediterranean and Near East. While it may be far-fetched to speak about an axial age, the search for similarities and parallel developments in distinct civilizations, which do not have much interface, can certainly lead to interesting or even important conclusions about the mechanisms through which civilizations undergo deep transformations.

A series of major political, cultural, and social changes affected all aspects of life in the Near East as well as around the Mediterranean under the Roman Empire. Religious beliefs and attitudes, in particular, underwent some dramatic transformations. Indeed, those scholars who, rejecting the Gibbonian paradigm of decline and fall, have taught us to look at the Roman Empire in the *longue durée*, as a time when new cultural frames were developed, have all insisted on the religious dimensions of late antique creativity. Each in his own way—Henri-Irénée Marrou, E. R. Dodds, Peter Brown, Robin Lane Fox—has been able to speak of the *religious revolution* of late antiquity.[4] One might argue that our period is no less crucial for future developments than the *Achsenzeit* identified by Karl Jaspers with the middle of the first millenium BCE.[5] In order to do justice to the dramatic nature of the transformations in our period, from, say, Jesus to Muhammad, one can also speak of "religious mutations." By borrowing this metaphor from the field of biology, I intend to highlight the fact that we do not only witness the passage from paganism to Christianity (to follow the traditional perception), or that from polytheism to monotheism. Rather, I wish to claim that we can observe nothing less than a transformation of the very concept of religion. To encapsulate the nature of this transformation, one may perhaps speak of "the end of sacrifice," in reference to the fact that at the time of Jesus, religion meant, for Jews and Greeks alike, the offering of sacrifice, while the situation had changed in some radical ways in the sixth century. But the multifaceted nature of this revolution encompassed other areas than the ritual and its transformations. One can also observe a series of transformations: of psychological conceptions, of the place and role of

books in religious life, and the passage from an essentially civic to a mainly communitarian nature of religion.

One question that has often been asked is that of the nature of these transformations: are they Christian by nature, or do they rather reflect the zeitgeist? Such a question, it seems to me, is fundamentally flawed. The kind of Christianity (or Christianities) that emerges from our period is not quite identical to the Christian beliefs of the early church fathers, and reflects itself the evolution of Christian beliefs and praxis during those centuries.

II

In order to assess the mutations of religion in the long late antiquity, one should probably focus first on what happened to the self during our period. Following Pierre Hadot, who had offered subtle analyses of what he called "spiritual exercises" in the practice of philosophy under the Empire, Michel Foucault sought in his later years to analyze "the care of the self" (*epimeleia heautou*) among ancient intellectuals.[6] For him, the radical denigration of the body among early Christian thinkers and ascetics brought this care of the self to an end. It seems to me, however, that Foucault's analysis is flawed in various ways. In particular, the corpus from which he drew his evidence was particularly limited (Foucault used mainly texts from Cassian's interpretation of Egyptian monasticism). It is true, of course, that he did not have the time to broaden and fully develop his analysis. However, even if more time had been granted to him, he probably would not have been able to offer a convincing analysis of the psychological transformations accompanying the passage from paganism to Christianity. This is so, I argue, because of his attempt (an attempt he shares with many) to understand this passage as an internal transformation of the Greco-Roman world, thus ignoring the Jewish dimensions of Christianity. Arnaldo Momigliano, would have been a better guide here, as he recognized the triple matrix of intellectual and religious life under the Empire: Jerusalem, together with Athens and Rome.[7] Indeed, the oriental nature of early Christianity seems to remain often undervalued.

A crucial psychological transformation occurred in our period, with the new recognition that what happened after death was so much more important than what happened to one in this life. This transformation, of course, was endowed with a religious nature, and would have far-reaching religious consequences. Think, for instance, of the profound differences between Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* and Augustine's *Confessions*. Personal eschatology would soon change in some radical ways both attitudes towards the self and the foundations of ethics. *Askēsis*, the constant exercising through which one sought to work upon oneself, was then endowed with a new meaning. *Askēsis* now meant an attempt at re-forming rather than discovering oneself. Christian anthropology was built on some

conceptions, both explicit and implicit, which entailed attitudes quite different from those of both Stoic and Platonic philosophies (the two main schools of thought in our period). These conceptions were directly inherited from the Hebrew Bible (more precisely, from its Greek translation, the Septuagint). One such conception was the idea (Gen. 1: 26) that man had been created in the image of God (*homo imago dei*). That usually entailed, in contradistinction to Platonic thought, the recognition of the intrinsic value of the human body. For most Christian thinkers, indeed, the nature of man encompassed both soul and body. Another one was the insistence on God's transcendence: the whole cosmos had been created by Him *ex nihilo*. This entailed a refusal to accept the Platonist idea of a real parenthood, or *sungeneia*, between the soul and the divine. Although Christian intellectuals accepted for a very long time many of the intellectual assumptions of the Platonists, without recognizing that this would lead them into some serious self-contradictions, they usually stopped short of thinking that the human soul could, thanks to its *sungeneia* with the divine, reach deification (*theōsis*) at the end of the ascetical praxis. This praxis, rather, was usually conceived in the terms of an *imitatio Christi*, leading to sanctification, sometimes through martyrdom. In contradistinction to the *askēsis* of the philosophers, Christian *askēsis* (as well as Jewish *askēsis*) sought more a *metanoia* (Heb. *teshuva*) than an *epistrophē*, a repentance of one's sins more than a turning over from matter to the divine.

In the religious world of late antiquity, one can distinguish different ideal types (*Idealtypen*) of religious virtuosi. While the priest and the prophet seem to have either disappeared or retreated into the background, the stage is mainly left to the sage, the Gnostic, and the saint. To be sure, all three characters appear at once in the major religious trends. It stands to reason, however, that the various traditions show different constellations between these *Idealtypen*. It seems to me that while the Jews hesitate mainly between the figure of the sage and that of the saint, the main figures for the Christians are that of the saint and that of the Gnostic, while "pagans" value mainly the figure of the sage and that of the Gnostic.

For Christians and Jews, the revealed scriptures entailed a "dialogical" way of deciphering the self through a constant involvement with the scriptures (in particular, reading or recitation of the Psalms). The growth of religious conceptions based on a revealed book, in the centuries between Jesus and Muhammad, reflects indeed a major transformation of religion.

III

The first centuries of the Roman Empire witnessed what is probably the most radical revolution in the history of the book until Gutenberg. This revolution has two aspects. On the one hand, the passage from roll to codex —a passage at first slow and gradual, from the first to the fourth century, transformed the very appearance and circulation of the book. This does not hold for Christians, however, as they adopted the codex almost instantaneously. On the other hand, the development of silent reading permits a new attitude to the book and its contents, and introduces a new, reflexive dignity of the single reader. In a sense, both transformations point to a privatization of reading, to a more personal, and less public, relationship between the reader and the text. Such a privatization would in its turn permit an almost unbounded spectrum of hermeneutical possibilities. Now when such a new approach to books is linked to the emphasis on a single corpus of texts ennobled as revealed scripture, it is easy to see the dramatic implications of this cultural revolution on religion itself.[8]

In order to identify and highlight the common denominator of a series of religious trends from early Christianity to early Islam, the comparative historian of religion Wilfred Cantwell Smith has referred to “the scriptural movement” of late antiquity.[9] Indeed, a series of religious movements appeared in late antiquity throughout the Near East and the Mediterranean that were all identified through their scriptures. While this view of things has much to commend itself, it does not tell the whole story. Indians and Orphics, for instance, had had a long tradition of sacred books, while both Jewish and Zoroastrian scriptures had been redacted much earlier. The Gathas seem to have represented, for perhaps as long as a millenium, a very special case of book: a book preserved orally, in a quite fixed form. (Similarly, the Qur’an seems to have existed, at least for some decades, only in oral form.) The Gathas would be put in writing only much later, after the Muslim conquest of Iran, when the Zoroastrian community was much weakened and fearing for its identity. For the rabbinic movement, a strong propensity to move away from the written text of the Bible to oral traditions (the Oral Torah, *torah she-be-al-peh*) can easily be detected in the

first centuries of the Christian era.[10] The writing phase among the Jews had taken place earlier, under the Second Commonwealth, when a plethora of works, eventually called pseudepigraphical and apocryphal books of the Hebrew Bible, had been written.

Indeed, the library at Qumran seems to have been very significant. Calculations suggest that only in the ninth century would the library in the Sankt Gallen monastery have surpassed Qumran in the number of the volumes it held. Their relationship to books represents a major difference between Jews and Christians in late antiquity. Rabbinic Judaism seems to have been satisfied with one revealed book, commenting on it orally (in the Talmud and Midrash) and rejecting or ignoring all other books. Christians read their books mainly in order to follow Jesus Christ, the supreme exemplar, whose life (and death) one sought to imitate. For the Jews, there was no single biblical figure comparable to that of Jesus for the Christians. The Christians had offered a radical simplification of myth, while the Jews proposed a radical simplification of the notion of holy text. The Christian ideal of *imitatio Christi* permitted the development of a puzzling phenomenon: the saint, the holy man, would soon be described in terms of writing: he would himself be presented as a book to be deciphered, read, commented upon.[11]

A puzzling parallelism can be observed in the redaction and canonization process of the Mishnah and the New Testament. Both seem to have been edited at more or less the same time, from the eighties of the second century to the early third century. This striking fact has not really been explained. I suggest it reflects the result of the race, between the now distinct communities, throughout the second century, to differentiate themselves from their competitors. Both communities sought to offer the correct interpretation of the same text (a text that Christians read in a [Jewish] translation): the Hebrew Bible. In a sense, one can claim that the Mishnah and the New Testament represent two different hermeneutical keys to the Bible. The Mishnah (in Greek *deuterōsis*, repetition) represents, just like the New Testament, the *kainē diathēkē*, the way through which the community can read and understand the true religious meaning of the Bible. The respective registers of the Mishnah and the New Testament, of course, reflect the deeply different religious structures of the two religions.[12]

Among the new religious movements of late antiquity, Manichaeism is perhaps the most fascinating. One is dealing here with a strongly dualistic

movement perceiving itself, from the start, as a world religion, based upon revealed scriptures. In various ways, Manichaeism appears as a radicalization of some trends already delineated in early Christianity, and also as a preview of characters usually identified with early Islam. When he invented, in 1873, the locution "religions of the book," Max Müller was seeking to modernize and generalize an early Islamic conception. While the concept of "people of the book" (*ahl al-kitāb*) does not seem to appear before the Qur'an, Mani himself, around the mid-third century, was well aware of the various scriptural traditions of different religious systems. The first of the Manichaean *Kephalaia* represents in this regard an understudied key text. Mani lists various prophets—Jesus, Zarathustra, Buddha—who each made the mistake of not carefully committing to writing his oral teaching. The distortion of their respective teachings by their followers would be the unavoidable consequence of such a mistake. Therefore, Mani, in contradistinction to his predecessors in the long chain of prophecy, took great pains to retain a written version of his message. One can clearly see in this text a deep fear of falsifications of scriptures, a fear also reflected in Jewish–Christian traditions and in the Qur'an in regard to the Hebrew scriptures. What is peculiar to Manichaeism, of course, is the total rejection of the Jewish claims, a rejection reflected in the absence of Moses from the list of prophets.

Manichaean rejectionism highlights the close connection, to be broken only by Marcionism, between Judaism and Christianity. Throughout their long polemics with the Jews in late antiquity, Christian authors were not able to deny the advantage of the Jews over them: only the latter could read their own writings in the original language. The church fathers perceived the Jews as *librarii nostri*,[13] *custodes librorum nostrorum* as Augustine would call them.[14] In 418, when Christians, encouraged by the local bishop, organized a pogrom in Minorca, plundering Jewish houses and properties, they took great care of salvaging from the fire the Torah scrolls in the synagogue.[15] But the evidence is here too scarce to permit important conclusions. Another instance of the deep ambivalence toward the Hebrew scriptures is highlighted in Justinian's *Novella* 146, dating from 553. Forbidding the cultic reading of the Bible in Hebrew, the Novella reflects the Emperor's perception of the symbolic power that the Jews derived from their knowledge of the revealed scriptures' original language.[16]

Christians, who were not bound by cultural, religious, or linguistic traditions, offered a new attitude to religious language. For them the *traduttore* (translator) was no *traditore* (traitor). On the contrary, the idea of translation, from an archaic to a common language, understood by all and sundry, was of the essence of their religion. The ease with which Christians accepted, encouraged, and used translations of their scriptures has no parallel in the ancient world before the Manichaeans, who would even offer a more radical version of this approach. Their disregard for archaic language and hieratic forms of expression is also reflected in Christian polemics with Hellenic intellectuals about sublime language versus *sermo humilis*. Christian intellectuals insisted, against their Hellenic counterparts, that their religion was the same for philosophers and fishermen, a fact that explained and justified the Gospels' low language. While Emperor Julian, in the second half of the fourth century, condemns and derides Christians for the mediocre literary level of their scriptures, his very polemics shows the extent to which even he was influenced by the Christian conception of scripture. To give another example, when Proclus, the leader of the Academy, states that he would seek to retain, of all books, only Plato's *Timaeus* and the *Chaldean Oracles*, he too shows the deep influence of the concept of scriptures. Together with a marked lack of emphasis on the power inherent to original language, Christians, more than any other religious movement, were willing to reject the idea of an oral, esoteric tradition existing side by side with scriptures. This rejection, which fitted the ethos of Christianity as offering salvation equally to all, was certainly enhanced by the fight against such esoteric traditions embedded in Gnostic trends.[17]

The Christianization of the Empire entailed the subtle transformation of the educational system. Before the end of the fourth century, Christians also learned to teach those texts of Greek mythology to which they had been so vehemently opposed. Hellenic culture, then, would now be transmitted thanks to its former enemies, the Christians. In order to do this, Christian intellectuals were brought to apply to the Hellenic tradition too the set of hermeneutic rules they had developed in order to appropriate to themselves the Israelite scriptures. To borrow a metaphor invented by Crick and Watson to describe the structure of DNA, one could perhaps speak here of a "double helix." Christian thinkers sought to find a series of similarities and parallels between the two cultural systems of Athens and Jerusalem. It is

this double helix which stands at the root of Christian culture, which was first elaborated in late antiquity, and which informed European culture to modern times. Christian culture, then, constituted itself, both in the East and in the West, through slipping from biblical to cultural hermeneutics.[18] The monasteries are the *locus classicus* where this work on books was achieved. This was a complex effort involving reading, writing, and interpreting. The complex cultural system developed in the monasteries was based upon the central figure of Jesus Christ, through which all mythology revolved. Similarly, the libraries were built, as a whole, around one book of scripture, which contained, if properly understood, all secrets and all wisdom. Like the rabbinic sages who, borrowing the Greek concept of *paideia* (education), had transformed it into their central religious value, Christian intellectuals of late antiquity succeeded to a great extent in applying to the Greek intellectual tradition and to their own scriptures the same hermeneutical rules. In both cases, such attitudes entailed quite a new place and role for books in religious life and thought.

IV

We have seen so far how some deep psychological and cultural transformations in the Roman world both permitted and imposed a radical restructuring of the very idea of ritual. The rise of Scriptures as the very backbone of religious movements transformed attitudes toward religious stories, or myths. It stands to reason that a similar transformation of the ritual should be discerned, as all religions hinge upon the two functions of myth-making (or telling) and ritual action. To a new conception of *historia sacra* should correspond a new kind of religious praxis.

I suggested above that the traditional distinction of polytheistic versus monotheistic religions is not always particularly useful from a heuristic viewpoint. Indeed, in the ancient world, both polytheists and monotheists used to offer blood sacrifices to the divinity or divinities, and considered such sacrifices to represent the very acme of religious life. Thus, Emperor Julian, in the second half of the fourth century, could write that "the Jews behave like the Gentiles, except the fact that they recognize only one god. In everything else, however, we share the same things: temples, sanctuaries, altars, purification rituals, various demands in which we do not diverge from one another, or else only in insignificant ways."[19]

Sacrificiorum aboleatur insania. (Let the madness of sacrifices end!) This law of Constantinus II, preserved in the Theodosian Codex, encapsulates the revolution started by Constantine and pursued by his successors.[20] This revolution was radical in its consequences: it brought an end to public sacrifices. To be sure, the idea of animal (or for that matter human) sacrifice never quite disappeared, and various traces of it are retained in later forms of Christianity, while Islam has a feast of sacrifice (*'Eid al-aḍḥa*).

Long before the fourth century CE, a major debate had been raging in Hellenic thought on the value of sacrifice. Lucian of Samosata, that second-century Voltaire, who knew how to poke fun at various ritual practices and religious attitudes, had sharply criticized sacrifices in his diatribe *Peri thusiōn* ("On sacrifices"). In the third century, Porphyry, following Theophrastus and his *Peri eusebeias* ("On piety"), could claim that the philosopher was the true priest of the supreme god, and that his thought was

the true temple. It is this identity that isolates the philosopher from the *polis* and its public rituals. In his treatise *De abstinentia*, Porphyry, drawing the logical consequence of his repulsion from animal killing, argues in favor of vegetarianism. In this context, one should call attention to his belief that the Jews are a race of philosophers, precisely because their sacrificial practices, in contradistinction to those of other peoples, are due to historical necessities rather than to low instincts. For Porphyry, then, true sacrifice is union with god, accomplished by the wise man through *apatheia* (lack of passions).[21]

Even a traditionalist like Iamblichus, who argues in favor of sacrifices, recognizes that they are not needed by the superior beings. Blood sacrifices, for him, are expected only by the lower gods, and represent only the material aspect of cult. For him, thus, spiritual sacrifices exist side by side with blood sacrifices.[22]

When their single temple, in Jerusalem, was destroyed by Titus in 70 CE, the Jews had to reinvent their religion in some dramatic ways, while arguing that they were changing very little, and this only under duress. If Jews could be perceived by some as a race of philosophers (for instance by Numenius, who argued in the second century CE, that Plato was "an atticizing Moses"), it seems to me that it is in no small measure due to the fact that they could now be perceived as a religion without blood sacrifices. Some dramatic consequences followed from the destruction of the Temple. The first was the birth of two new religions, rather than one. Side by side with the birth of Christianity, the appearance of rabbinic Judaism after 70 CE and its growth in the following centuries represent a real mutation of the religion of Israel. Indeed, it had now become a religion with no sacrifices, whose priests were out of business, in which religious specialists had been replaced by the intellectual elite. In a way, early Christianity, a religion centered upon a sacrificial ritual celebrated by priests, represents a more obvious continuity with the religion of Israel than that of the rabbis. The Temple's fall, and the impossibility of offering sacrifices, entailed the transformation of the ritual: daily sacrifices were now replaced by prayers recalling the sacrifices of old. The absence of a temple and the neutralization of priests, in turn, brought at once a spatial explosion of Jewish ritual and its democratization. There was no *omphalos* anymore, no obvious place that God could call His own house.

According to a famous rabbinic conception, the *shekhina*, or divine presence (from the root *shakhan*, to dwell), exiled from the destroyed Temple, was now staying within "the four cubits of *halakha*," within the small limits of personal religious duties.[23] In other words, religion had now moved from the public to the private sphere. *Askēsis*, prayer, almsgiving: the various duties of private religion were all considered as due replacements for sacrifice. A rabbinic text compares, for instance, the fat burnt during a fast to the fat of a sacrificial animal.[24] When the rabbis say that after the destruction of the Temple, an iron wall rose between God and Israel, they mean to insist on the fact that Judaism has become a religion of alienation, a religion of God's absence.[25] Man must behave as if he did not expect a clear and distinct voice to answer his prayers, as if the time-consecrated *do ut des* formula did not work anymore. In a way, this attitude is rather similar to that of the church fathers, about whom one could speak, in Weberian parlance, of an *Entzauberung* ("disenchantment"). The religion of the rabbis had replaced that of the prophets. The priests had disappeared for all practical purposes. They might have been a catalyst for the development of new mystical attitudes within the Jewish community. It stands to reason that the forms of mystical experience, as they are described in late antique Hebrew literature, and also in Gnostic and Judeo-Christian texts and traditions, were somewhat similar to those encountered by the priests in the Temple, who were likely to have had a deep sense of the presence of the divine.[26]

In strong opposition to rabbinic Judaism, emerging from the Council of Yavne after the destruction of the Temple, early Christianity unabashedly presented itself as a sacrificial religion, although one of a new kind, in which the central ritual was called *anamnēsis*, a reactualization, or even reactivation—rather than our weaker term "memory"—of Jesus' sacrifice. It was a religion without temples, in which the same sacrifice was offered perpetually, on a daily basis. It was offered by priests, organized in a hierarchy (in contradistinction to the basic equality of rank between rabbis). The very metaphorizing of biblical traditions by Christian thinkers permitted the conservation of the terms of Israelite religion. One also finds in early Christian literature, as in rabbinic texts, a metaphorical use of sacrifice: Clement of Rome, already, refers to "a contrite heart" as the true sacrifice, whereas the fourth-century Euchites, or Messalians, will develop, as in Qumran, a theory and practice of continual prayer in order to keep

Satan away in terms alluding to the “perpetual sacrifice” in the Jerusalem Temple.

In Christian literature of the first centuries one can follow the clear development of sacrificial vocabulary. The language of martyrdom, strikingly, is replete with allusions to sacrifice. The clearest testimony of this perception of martyrdom as a sacrifice is probably the *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity*. *Imitatio Christi*, when it goes as far as the willingness to give one’s life for one’s faith, transforms the martyr, like Jesus, into a sacrifice, more precisely, a human sacrifice. This is very significant, as human sacrifices were considered by pagans and Christians alike in the Roman Empire as representing the very border between humanity and barbarism.[27] As the historian of art Jas Elsner has been able to show, the transformation of Roman art from Augustus to Justinian reflects a deep evolution of subjectivity in Roman culture. The martyrs do not offer sacrifice; they are the sacrifice, and no reciprocity, no immediate *quid pro quo* is expected from the divinity.[28] In that sense, Christian martyrdom reflects a radical change in the conception of sacrifice, a fundamental break in the very nature of religion.

More than the rabbis, the church fathers were quite aware of the novelty of their religion and of the originality of their thought. This awareness is reflected, for instance, in their ability to offer what one can call “histories of religion,” and theses about the evolution of religious doctrines and practices, in particular, sacrifice, from the earliest times. Similar conceptions are much rarer among Jewish thinkers, and only Maimonides, in the twelfth century, would develop a full-fledged historical and comparative theory of sacrifice, a theory which retains traces of a Christian influence.[29]

To conclude these brief reflections on the transformation of the ritual, one should perhaps point out once more the deep ambiguity of sacrifice. Transformed, reinterpreted, metaphorized, memorized, it seems never to die out quite completely. Late antiquity experienced the end of public sacrifices as the core of religious praxis, but that did not mean an end to the very idea of sacrifice.

V

The end of sacrifices as a central and public religious practice in late antiquity led to a major crisis in the conception of ritual purity. Since the prophets of Israel, through Jesus and Mani, the value of the ancient ways of re-establishing ritual purity had been seriously questioned.[30] The abandonment of the temples, and often their destruction through fits of iconoclastic violence, raised other questions regarding religious identity, which had usually been centered around shrines. Traditionally, temples had been built on central, clearly visible places, either within or without cities. Now the *oikoumenē*, the inhabited world, was being emptied of its temples, as it were, and in their place, churches were being built. They were built in the place of temples, but not always quite on the same sites. Various studies of the transformation of the urban texture in late antiquity show that churches were much more dispersed, in the different neighborhoods of cities, and not necessarily at their centers. Moreover, in most religious cults of the ancient world, the ritual was usually performed in the open, and in public (Mithraic cult represents here a striking exception), while synagogue and church ritual were almost only performed inside, for the community of the faithful. A central aspect of this ritual was the reading, singing, translating, and commenting of scriptural passages, a fact that imposed a closed building, usually of rather limited dimensions. The new forms of ritual entailed, then, new forms of cultic buildings. Such concrete transformations of religious life, and the new importance of religious communities, permit a better understanding of the nature of the changes than E. R. Dodds's talk about a new spirituality.[31]

While Christian authors usually insisted with pride upon the novelty of their religion, this novelty was precisely what the traditionalists feared most. Thus, Emperor Julian expressed his wish to avoid novelty altogether, but in particular in the religious domain. But this very expression of his fear reflects the fact that such deep changes were precisely occurring at the time. While civic rituals, by definition open to all, were meant to reaffirm collective identity, the new forms of identity that were becoming prevalent were by nature religious, and open only to members of the community—in contradistinction to society at large.

As argued by John Scheid, a deep transformation of religious practice had occurred in Rome, starting at the end of the civil wars, and growing with Roman expansionism and under the Empire. With the growth of the cities, the direct participation of all citizens in the cult was eventually made impossible, and the cult became the business of their representatives. Hence, a more abstract religion, which had not yet changed in nature, became more internalized: for many, religious participation was now intellectual, done through reading. Scheid, who sees here a *praeparatio evangelica* of sorts, suggests a parallel with the Jewish communities from the diaspora, which had learned to function without the Jerusalem Temple.[32] This is certainly true, although one should be careful not to overemphasize the differences between the Jewish communities in Palestine and in the diaspora. The term "scriptural communities," coined by Brian Stock to describe medieval phenomena, is applicable in the ancient world to philosophers and Jews alike. Such communities were found in Palestine as well as in the diaspora, around the *batei midrash* ("study halls") and the synagogues, where the scriptures were interpreted. Psycho-sociological analysis, then, can bring us to a better understanding of the nature of the new religiosity emerging in the Roman Empire. The forms of ritual were focusing on the scriptures, which were to be read and interpreted, and offered the basis for calls to personal repentance from sin.

Already in the second and third centuries, the willingness of urban elites to retain the traditional values of the old civic model began to be questioned. In the fourth century, these elites too often showed no real interest in exercising their political duties. Together with the slow depopulation of the cities, this trend helps to explain the growth of religious communities. Such communities, to be sure, had existed for a long time. But under the Empire, in particular from the third century, what John North, using a metaphor borrowed from Peter Berger, has called "the supermarket of religions" offered multiple possibilities for a religious identity freely chosen. Garth Fowden, for his part, argues that the broad acceptance of such conceptions of communitarian identity became characteristic of late antiquity.[33]

In Rome, religion had meant, almost exclusively, the observance of the ritual. Questions of truth were quite absent from the religious sphere. In order to understand the transformation of such a conception into that of Augustine, for whom *vera religio* represents, first of all, an internalized

phenomenon, we must recognize the inversion of the relation of two pairs of notions: sacred versus profane, and public versus private. As both Cicero and Marcian tell us, religion, or the sacred, was in Rome essentially a public affair. What remained private was categorized as profane. With the internalization and individualization of religion, the two pairs would become inversed. Among both Jews and Christians, the field of the sacred was identified with the private domain, while the public domain remained essentially profane. This was certainly the case until the fourth century. With the progressive, but rapid, Christianization of the Empire, things changed, and religion (i.e., "orthodox" Christianity) sought to reclaim the public sphere. From Constantine to Theodosius II, religion eventually became an affair of state again, and received all the attributes of civic religion in ancient Rome, but with a twist. As the principle of religious authority was now rooted in personal conscience, and religion identified also with truth, the rejection of the right path (i.e., the interpretation of religion adopted by the Emperor) would have immediate and radical consequences.

Since Gibbon, various explanations have been offered to the rise of religious intolerance and violence (two different but connected phenomena) in the world of late antiquity. As such violence and intolerance were mainly the work of Christians, it is either in the nature of Christianity (i.e., its origins in Jewish exclusiveness) or in its history (i.e., in the collusion, not before the fourth century, between state and church) that the roots of Christian violence and intolerance have been sought. It seems to me that both approaches err in their static character: they are unable to account for the deep transformation of mental patterns within Christian communities from the first to the fourth century. Early Christian communities, which remained *entpolitisiert* in the strongest sense of this Weberian expression, could, like the Qumran community, develop freely, upon a radical interpretation of their scriptures, some violent ideas about the *Endzeit* and the final eschatological war. The trouble began when they were suddenly put in a position of power. Most were unable to realize at once that the new political fortune demanded a new hermeneutics. As we know too well, similar phenomena are known elsewhere, also in contemporary history.[34]

In order to understand the growth in religious intolerance and violence in late antiquity, one must recognize the new fact of an identity defined, more than ever before, in religious terms. People now perceived themselves

as belonging to a freely chosen community. While Jewish exclusiveness made space for non Jews (for instance as "God fearers," fellow travelers of sorts, or as "pious among the nations"), Christian universalism could not easily tolerate outsiders. By definition, such outsiders were heretics, pagans, or Jews. Only the last could be, to a certain extent, tolerated on the fringes of society. With time, these fringes had a tendency to shrink. As we have seen, Justinian cannot tolerate their use of Hebrew anymore, and in the early seventh century, forced baptism is demanded in the Byzantine Empire.

Jews and Christians knew exactly the stakes of the conflict between them, and the rules of the game (true prophecy and the correct understanding of their common scriptures). Between Christians and "pagans," on the other hand, a *dialogue de sourds* was soon established. On both sides, it seems, there was a total lack of understanding of the nature of the other side's religion. Both Christians and "pagans" sought to understand one another in their own terms. From one of the most impressive intellectual testimonies to this conflict, Origen's *Contra Celsum* (a text written around the mid-third century), at least, it would appear that the main argument between them focused on the idea of civic religion, or of the relationship between state and religion.[35]

To the extent that it claimed to be the sole representative of true prophecy, Islam was similar to Christianity. But its success in transforming the community of the faithful (the *umma*) into imperial society (a transformation probably due mainly to the fast pace of the Arab conquests) permitted Muslims to set a relationship between state and religion that ever evaded Christian rulers, East and West.

[1] Munich and Zurich, 1949. For a former version of the following paragraphs, see Guy G. Stroumsa, "Robert Bellah on the Origins of Religion: A Critical Review," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 229 (2012), 467–77.

[2] See further Jóhann Páll Árnason, S. N. Eisenstadt, and Björn Wittrock, eds, *Axial Civilizations and World History*, Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture, 4 (Leiden and Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2004).

[3] "Religious Evolution," *The American Sociological Review* 29 [1964], 358–74). The topic of the "axial age" was recently studied anew from a number of facets in Robert N. Bellah and Hans Joas, eds, *The Axial Age and Its Consequences* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2012).

[4] See for instance H.-I. Marrou, *Décadence romaine ou antiquité tardive? IIIe–IVe siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977). For Marrou, the new religiosity constituted the main originality of late antiquity. E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious*

Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965). R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (Harmondsworth: Viking, 1986). P. Brown, "Brave Old World" (a review of R. Lane Fox's book), *New York Review of Books* (12 March 1987), p. 27.

[5] For a new analysis of Jaspers' thesis, see S. N. Eisenstadt, ed., *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986).

[6] P. Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), pp. 19–74 and 313–19. M. Foucault, *L'herméneutique du sujet: cours au Collège de France 1981–1982* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001).

[7] See for instance A. Momigliano, "Religion in Athens, Rome and Jerusalem in the First Century B.C.," in Momigliano, *On Pagans, Jews and Christians* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), pp. 74–91. On Momigliano as a historian of religion, see G. G. Stroumsa, "Arnaldo Momigliano and the History of Religions," in *Momigliano and Antiquarianism Foundations of the Modern Cultural Sciences*, ed. P Miller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press in association with the UCLA Center for Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Studies and the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 2007), pp. 286–311.

[8] I have dealt with aspects of this revolution in Guy G. Stroumsa, "Early Christianity: A Religion of the Book?" in *Homer, the Bible and Beyond: Literary and Religious Canons in the Ancient World*, ed. Margalit Finkelberg and Guy G. Stroumsa (Leiden and Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2003), pp. 153–73.

[9] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993). See further Guy G. Stroumsa, "The Scriptural Movement of Late Antiquity: A Reappraisal," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* (2008), 61–76.

[10] See the most thorough study of Ya'akov Sussmann, "Torah she-be-al-peh peshutah ke-mashma'ah," in *Mehkerei Talmud*, ed. Y. Sussmann and D. Rosenthal (Jerusalem, 2005), pp. 209–384.

[11] See for instance P. Magdalino, "'What we heard in the Lives of the saints we have seen with our own eyes': the holy man as literary text in tenth-century Constantinople," in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. J. Howard-Johnston and P. A. Hayward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 83–113.

[12] This is developed further in Guy G. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 2nd edn (Leiden and Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2005), pp. 79–91.

[13] Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 56.9, PL vol. 36, col. 666.

[14] Augustine, *Sermo* 5.5, PL vol. 38, col. 57.

[15] See S. Bradbury, ed. and trans., *Severus of Minorca, Letter on the Conversion of the Jews* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[16] For the text of the Novella, see Amnon Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1987), pp. 402–11. See further Leonard Rutgers, "Justinian's Novella 146, between Jews and Christians," in *Jewish Culture and Society under the Christian Roman Empire*, ed. Richard Lee Kalmin and Seth Schwartz (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), pp. 385–407.

[17] See Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom*, passim.

[18] See Guy G. Stroumsa, *Barbarian Philosophy: The Religious Revolution of Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), pp. 27–43.

[19] Julian, *Against the Galileans*, 306B (406–7 LCL).

[20] *Theodosian Codex* XVI.10.2. See N. Belayche, "Partager la table des dieux: L'empereur Julien et les sacrifices," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 218 (2001), 457–86.

[21] Porphyry, *On Abstinence*, II. 26–7.

[22] Iamblichus, *The Mysteries of Egypt*, V.15.

[23] *Babylonian Talmud*, *Berachot*, 8a.

[24] *Babylonian Talmud*, *Berachot*, 17a.

[25] *Babylonian Talmud*, *Berachot*, 32b.

[26] See R. Elior, *The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism* (Oxford and Portland, Or.: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004).

[27] See J. Rives, "Human Sacrifice among Pagans and Christians," *Journal of Roman Studies* 85(1995), 65–85.

[28] J. Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), esp. ch. II, pp. 157 ff.

[29] See Guy G. Stroumsa, "Cultural Memory in Early Christianity: Clement of Alexandria and the History of Religions," in *Axial Civilizations and World History*, ed. Jóhann Páll Árnason, S. N. Eisenstadt, and Björn Wittrock, *Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture*, 4 (Leiden and Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2004), pp. 293–315, and Guy G. Stroumsa, "John Spencer and the Roots of Idolatry," *History of Religions* 40 (2001), 1–23.

[30] See Stroumsa, *Barbarian Philosophy*, pp. 268–81.

[31] Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*.

[32] John Scheid, "Religione e società," in Emilio Gabba and Aldo Schiavone, eds., *Storia di Roma*, vol. 4 (Turin: Einaudi, 1989), pp. 631–59. See further John Scheid, *Religion et piété à Rome*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001 [1985]), pp. 119 ff.

[33] John North, "The Development of Religious Pluralism," in *The Jews among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire*, ed. Judith Lieu, John North, and Tessa Rajak (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 174–93. Garth Fowden, "Religious Communities," in *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*, ed. G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 82–106.

[34] See Stroumsa, *Barbarian Philosophy*, pp. 8–26.

[35] This is developed further in *Barbarian Philosophy*, pp. 44–56.

Patterns of Rationalization

I

In late antiquity, the dynamic contacts between pagan and monotheistic religions, as well as the transformation of religion itself, made a deep impact upon society and culture. The invention of Gnostic and Manichaean mythologies, the growth of the cult of the saints among Christians, and the development of monotheism among pagan intellectuals are only three of the most striking phenomena reflecting this interface. Such trends reflect the existence of what we can call a religious *koinē*, a shared religious platform, or common denominator to all religious identities, existing side by side with the usually conflicting aspect of inter-religious relations. I propose, tentatively, to refer to this *koinē* as "late antique religion," or, if you prefer, "meta-religion." One of the most striking components of this "meta-religion" is what seems to be the universal growth of magic, a basic religious attitude crossing all traditional and official religious boundaries in the late ancient Mediterranean and Near East. The stupendous number of magical bowls, from all provenances, remains the most striking testimony to this religious *koinē*, shared not only by the lower tier, but also by the social elites of the different communities.[1]

The relatively new term "rationalization" is polyvalent and not easily defined. Since its appearance in the mid-nineteenth century, it has been mainly used in the context of industry and management, as well as in psychoanalysis. Today, "rationality" commonly appears in the context of game theory as well as in the cognitive sciences. "What is meant by rationality is neither clear nor constant," notes the French anthropologist Dan Sperber.[2] In the entry "Rationalisierung" in the wonderful tool that is the *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*, Rudolph Wofgang Müller insists on Max Weber's major contribution to the meaning of the term in twentieth-century sociology.[3] In Weberian parlance, *Rationalisierung* refers to the progressive mastery of man upon earth, and to what Weber called *Entzauberung der Welt*, "disenchantment of the world." For Weber, rationalization means "the knowledge or belief that if one but wished one could learn it at any time. Hence, it means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play,

but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted."[4]

Processes of rationalization reflect the conscious, reflexive effort to bring more rationality to a religious tradition, to a set of rituals or beliefs. While rationalization entails a relationship between religion and reason, it mainly emphasizes a process: religions are susceptible, in time, to developing a more rational argumentation, both in polemics (either internal or external) and in reflection about themselves. Rationalization, then, is a reflexive process. But it seems to be a collective process rather than the intellectual activity of individual thinkers.

One could, of course, simplify the topic a bit by proposing a reflection on the constant tension between "faith and reason," to follow the traditional problem in Christian theology from the patristic period to medieval scholasticism, and beyond. One could also analyze "rationalist" theological trends in a given religious tradition and/or during a certain period. Another approach would focus on the dialectic relationship between two (or three) of the "Abrahamic religions" at a particular polemical moment. But "rationalization in religion" does not simply mean the ways in which religion integrates rational discussion of its beliefs. According to Sperber, rationality "implies a certain degree of consistency between beliefs and experience and among beliefs. Rationality, then, presupposes cognitive mechanisms which tend to prevent or to eliminate empirical inconsistencies and logical contradictions."[5]

Speaking of rationalization in religion involves a number of implicit claims, which one should try to make explicit. First, religion is perceived as an attempt to understand the world, offering solutions to perennial, basic fears. For such a conception, religion is a kind of explanatory or etiological thinking. Myths are the first expression of these solutions, which are later recast in philosophical hermeneutics. We are dealing here with an intellectualist conception of religion, even when etiological thinking is expressed only in ritual, rather than in discourse. This is the case, in particular, of preliterate societies. Hence, we may say that rationalization in religion, a phenomenon reflexive by nature, and already present in mythological thought patterns, reflects religion thinking about itself, transforming symbolic and mythological thought into either discursive thought or ritual praxis.

In order to understand what rationalization means in the context of religious history, it may be useful to go back to Max Weber's theory of development of reason throughout Western civilization. For Weber, as is well known, the most striking "disenchantment of the world" in history occurred with the rise of the "inner-worldly" asceticism (*innerweltliche Askese*) of the Calvinist Reformation. And yet, it can be argued that also in earlier periods, one can witness religious transformations, even mutations, which may also be described in similar terms. Sadly, Weber did not have the opportunity to work on early Christianity. Had he been given the time to do so, he might well have described the rejection of the Gnostic *Weltanschauung* by the church fathers of late antiquity as a clear case of "disenchantment."[6] For the sake of brevity, I ignore here the various (and often rather otiose) recent objections to the very concept of Gnosticism. The Gnostic movement in the early Roman Empire represented a broader religious trend, or spectrum, than what we usually refer to as a sect. Yet, it remained diffuse, without becoming a full-fledged religion, and seems to have worked its way, mainly, as a radicalization of the dualist tendency inherent to the earliest strata of Christianity. To a great extent, the various Gnostic solutions to the problem of evil were based upon a return to mythic modes of thought, appealing to patterns inherited from apocryphal Jewish literature as well as from Greek mythological traditions.[7]

Both Gnostics and Manichaeans sought in their different ways (the latter as a world church established on strongly dualistic patterns) to offer a response to the question of the origin of evil (*Unde malum?*), a question which was particularly acute within a monotheistic milieu, in which the ultimate responsibility of the Demiurge for evil increased the urgency of a theodicy. Doing so, the dualist thinkers claimed to offer a return to a rigorously structured system, in a sense a "rationalization" of religion, which insisted on salvific knowledge (*gnōsis*), rather than on faith (*pistis*). The tension between *gnōsis* and *pistis* is also found in a Christian "orthodox," or mainstream theologian such as Clement of Alexandria, but for him there is a clear passage from the former to the latter.[8]

In contradistinction to Clement's approach, the dualist systems put the two terms, *pistis* and *gnōsis*, into dramatic opposition: the Gnostics, "those who know," being ontologically different from all other human beings, who are either servants of the lower demiurge, condemned to damnation, or, at best, "simple Christians," believers in a cause they do not really understand.

To be sure, many among the Gnostic dualists appealed to Greek philosophical traditions, and were deemed heretics by orthodox thinkers precisely because they followed pagan philosophers, although the use of reason by Gnostic theologians seems to be quite different from that of philosophers.[9] Dualist gnosis does not usually refer to a positive, demonstrable knowledge endowed with epistemic content. Rather, this gnosis is essentially esoteric, and is endowed with a saving value. Gnosis refers here to the secret myths explaining the universe. The Gnostics, just like the participants in the Greek mysteries, are the recipients of secret knowledge on the origins and the nature of both the cosmos and humans.[10] This secret knowledge is actually endowed with a direct soteriological power. Unlike all other human beings, the Gnostics (or the "true" Manichaeans, the community's ascetic, monastic core—those whom Augustine would call *electi*) will thus be saved. It is this claim of an esoteric knowledge about God and the cosmos that was rejected by the church fathers as preposterous.[11]

Referring to Augustine's polemics against the Manichaeism of his youth, the French philosopher Paul Ricœur has described Manichaean mythology as "a simulacrum of reason."[12] The multiple levels of reality, the complex structure of Manichaean cosmogony and cosmology, anthropogony, and anthropology, as well as eschatology of both the soul and the world's structure, all acted as a sophisticated scaffolding of sorts, supporting the world, and giving the misleading impression of rationality. But in fact, Manichaeism represented a flight into an unbridled, Gothic mythology attracting intellectually inclined spirits. It may well be that it is precisely its rigorous geometry (two powers, three times, pentads of divine hypostases, etc.) and its abstract character which prevented many from becoming captivated by the radical alternative of Manichaeism in late antiquity and beyond. It is indeed to Greek mythological thinking, rather than to Greek rational thinking, that Gnosticism was appealing.

Hence, Harnack's famous dictum, according to which Gnosticism was "the acute Hellenization of Christianity" (die akute Hellenisierung des Christentums), represents only a part of a historical perception of the phenomenon.[13] What is certain is that the eventual Christian rejection of Gnosticism reflected a denial of those mythological overgrowths, as well as the reaffirmation of a theology emphasizing not only God's unity, but also

His incarnation. It also positioned ethics at the very core of religion. In this sense, one may speak of a process of "disenchantment of the world" in action in late antiquity in general, and in early Christianity in particular.[14] The rejection of the radical Hellenization of Gnosis, therefore, might legitimately be perceived as both a case of "disenchantment of the world," and a process of rationalization of religion. Gnosis may well have represented the Hellenization of Christianity, but it certainly did not represent its rationalization. I wish to insist on this fact, which highlights the chasm between the Hellenization of Christianity and its rationalization, two contemporary but profoundly different processes.

It is the church fathers, then, rather than the dualist or Gnostic thinkers, who offered in late antiquity a "rationalization" of religion. This may sound counterintuitive, as "reason" is usually perceived as the prerogative of philosophers in the ancient world, while the earliest Christian intellectuals, the second-century apologetic fathers, had spent much of their energy rebutting pagan accusations of irrationality. For a long time, Hellenic intellectuals, such as Celsus or Alexander of Lycopolis, considered Christians as weak on metaphysics, even when they did recognize their impressive ethical behavior—for instance their courage in the face of persecution.[15] When Tertullian, at the turn of the third century, rhetorically asked whether there was anything that "Athens" shared with "Jerusalem," he was not juxtaposing Athena and Christ, but rather Socrates and Jesus.[16] Faith in the incarnated revelation was for him incommensurable with Greek philosophy, rather than with Greek religion. As we know, his approach remained a minority position in late antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages, as most Christian writers sought to find an accommodation between what they considered to be "the best parts" of Greek thought (usually a combination of Platonic ontology and Stoic ethics) and their own scriptural tradition. While Tertullian's fideism never made it into the mainstream of Christian thought, it never quite disappeared, and has remained a constant temptation, or rather a pole of attraction, for a number of significant thinkers, from Pascal to Kierkegaard. In a sense, Luther's appeal to *sola scriptura*, rejecting the long tradition of Scholastic hermeneutics, reflected a return to the fideist attitude first heralded by Tertullian. The perennial tension between the intellectualist and the fideist poles in Christian thought is traditionally expressed in the relationship between faith and reason in European intellectual history.

In his recent book, *Hellenisierung des Christentums*, Christoph Markschies has offered a thorough reflection on "Hellenization" as referring to the transformation processes in early Christianity and on the history of its use.[17] To pursue Markschies's reflection, one could point out that the marriage of Christian thought and Greek philosophy was the direct inheritor of the long flirtation of Jewish thinkers from Alexandria up to Philo, Paul's contemporary, with Hellenistic philosophy.

The transformation of religion in this period is also, *ipso facto*, the transformation of philosophy. While Christian faith sought very early to express itself through Greek concepts, Greco-Roman philosophers learned to focus on questions crucial for religion, even developing a need for Holy Scriptures, in imitation of the Christians. As we now know, far from remaining the privilege of Jews and Christians, monotheism developed in the Roman Empire also among pagan philosophers. Indeed, as Polymnia Athanassiadi puts it, in late antiquity "monotheism was becoming the politically correct religious idiom" [18] and the ascetical way of life typical of philosophers seems to have been quite close, at least structurally, to Christian asceticism. The "Neo-Hellenic" return to the gods of old by some Neoplatonic philosophers, a phenomenon that paradoxically owes much to the despised religion of the "Galileans," represents to some extent a reaction to the fascination with monotheism. Such an attitude represented a turn of philosophy to religion, parallel to the Christian appropriation of Platonic thought patterns. The close contacts between religion and philosophy in the Roman world, then, should not only be perceived as *Rationalisierung der Religion*. They may as well be described as "derationalization of philosophy" (*Entrationalisierung der Philosophie*).[19] Particularly helpful in understanding the transformation of philosophical life are both the Weberian concept of "forms of life" (*Lebensformen*) and Hadot's analysis of the ancient philosophical way of life, in particular the "spiritual exercises" cherished by the late Greek philosophers, and later identified with trends in Christian spirituality.[20] Under the Empire, asceticism and the quest for a pure life ultimately seeking unification with the divine belong to the zeitgeist.

We can see how complex things are: rationalization of religion is not quite the same thing as either Hellenization of thought or "disenchantment of the world"—and yet, there exist clear overlaps between these concepts. Eastern Christian writers retained, from the early centuries to the end of

Byzantium, a deep ambivalence to their very language, Greek. In Christian parlance, “Hellenes” had only one meaning: “pagans.” Christians, even when Greek was both their spoken and written language, never forgot the essential pagan character of that language. Only towards a few Greek philosophers (essentially Plato) did the church fathers seek to develop a different attitude. For Justin Martyr, in the first half of the second century, Plato’s noble doctrines reflected God’s decision to implant seeds of truth, before Christ’s coming, among all nations. Justin develops the idea of a *logos spermatikos*, a concept he borrows from Stoic philosophy, where it refers to the generative principle of the universe. It would eventually be accepted by most Christian theologians, at least implicitly, permitting them to salvage Plato from the abyss of perdition where most pagans belonged.[21] This did not prevent Christian authors, however, from highlighting the deep rift between even the best among the Greek philosophical schools and their own school of wisdom, which, they insisted, remained essentially different from (and of course better than) all the schools of Greek (i.e., pagan) philosophy.

Similarly, Tertullian remarks that in many cases, the pagan Seneca writes just as if he were a Christian: *Seneca saepe noster*—Seneca, who often sounds like one of us (i.e., a Christian).[22] The same Tertullian also develops the idea that the soul is Christian by nature: *anima naturaliter Christiana*.[23] In other words, these two references show that, even for Tertullian, the chasm between Christianity and pagan thought is not absolute, and revelation retains some deep similarities with the best among the pagan philosophers.

Christian teachers presented themselves as belonging to a new school of philosophy, better than those of the “Hellenes.” For Theodoret of Cyrrhus, a fifth-century theologian and church historian, *philosophia* would refer to the monastic way of life. In a sentence that sounds like a precursor of Marx’s famous dictum, Theodoret pointed out that while Greek philosophers sought to understand the world, the monks intended to transform it. The radical semantic transformation of *philosophia* reflects the limits of Christian Hellenization.

What I have called the late antique “disenchantment of the world” did not quite entail giving up on all mythology. Neither monotheisms nor dualisms are devoid of mythological thought patterns. Rather, the drastic limitation of the number of divine beings entailed a radical simplification of

mythical structures, when all angels had become God's hosts, and all demons Satan's helpers. The Neoplatonist philosophers were able to develop a hermeneutics based upon some of the traditional Greek myths, mainly as told in the Homeric epics.[24] Yet, religions having both ethics and history (more precisely history of salvation, *Heilsgeschichte*) at their core could develop rationalizing hermeneutics more naturally than philosophical systems.

II

According to the theory of "modes of religiosity" developed by the Oxford social and cognitive anthropologist Harvey Whitehouse, religious transmission essentially encompasses, in all societies, two very different sets of dynamics.[25] For him, the two essential modes of religiosity are the doctrinal mode and the imagistic one. The doctrinal mode involves the frequent repetition of teachings, relatively tame and expressed in words, and highly repetitive ritual performances. It entails the need for centralized authority and orthodoxy checks by religious leaders as the communities grow larger. In the imagistic mode, the infrequent repetition of rituals and beliefs ensures that communities do not spread widely. Religious practice tends, in this mode, to be intense and emotionally arousing; no need here for official authority to ensure intense social cohesion. Whitehouse points out that the dichotomy of modes of religiosity recalls other taxonomies, and refers to the opposition between charismatic and routinized religion for Weber, the Apollonian versus the Dionysiac for Ruth Benedict, the literate versus the image-based for Ernest Gellner,[26] the literate versus the non-literate for Jack Goody, or structure versus *communitas* for Victor Turner.

Whitehouse offers a variation on a long-recognized duality among sociologists and anthropologists. Different religious communities, of course, will insist more on one or the other mode of religiosity. Yet, it is important to remember that no religious tradition can be established on a single mode of religiosity, which should rather be conceived as what Weber called *Idealtypen* (Whitehouse, for his part, speaks of "attractor positions") never appearing *à l'état pur* in a historical context. For Whitehouse, indeed, the dynamics of religion are characterized by the combined action of the two modes of religiosity, rather than by the impact of a single mode. I should perhaps add that Whitehouse himself, as an anthropologist, is more conscious than most cognitive scientists of the need to show the applicability of models to particular ethnological or historical contexts, and has sought to show how the modes of religiosity can be applied to the Greco-Roman world.[27]

Whitehouse's model has some heuristic value in our present context, as we deal with the religious scene of the late antique Mediterranean and Near

East. More precisely, different combinations of the modes of religiosity should lead to different patterns of rationalization, as the reflexivity of religion will be expressed differently in each case. It is important to highlight the fact that modes of religiosity cut through all communities, although in different ways. For a long time scholarship has dealt with exoteric and esoteric trends in all late ancient religious movements: orthodoxy and heresy, priesthood and prophecy, wisdom and prophecy, public and private religion, tradition and revolution, activism and quietism, ritualistic and mystical trends. While such taxonomies are found in highly different milieus, it is essential to note that in each religious tradition, or group of communities, a different equilibrium is found between the two modes of religiosity. As I have already noted, this fact results in different rationalization patterns in each case.

From the start, Christianity gave up on most of the traditional markers of Jewish identity. In the Roman world, Christians had no easily observable identity, and Christian thinkers very soon learned to focus upon the few core Christian beliefs, such as the trinity of the one God, and the simultaneity of the divine and the human natures of Jesus Christ. Hence came the imperious need to distinguish true from false beliefs, and the birth of theological polemics, which would confront heterodoxy, or heresy, with orthodoxy. Theologians seek to interpret the scriptures in ways coherent with their own implicit intellectual and religious attitudes and beliefs. Their goal is to provide a global vision of their *Weltanschauung* devoid, as much as possible, of self-contradictions or even serious tensions. At the same time, however, they seek to inscribe themselves within the tradition of their community, a desire that perforce includes various contradictory statements.

The history of early Christian thought reflects the insoluble tension between these two opposing trends. Some writers, wishing to remain “orthodox” and to retain the bulk of the tradition, insisted on affirming *together* beliefs contradictory to one another. They argued that thanks to the divine *musterion*, two affirmations seemingly contradicting one another according to the rules of logic could nonetheless be both true. This thought pattern is quite clearly reflected, in particular, in the great theological debates about Trinitarian and Christological conceptions.

In contradistinction to the mainstream, heretical thinkers opted for intellectual consistency, at the price of giving up on important aspects of the tradition. They made radical choices (the Greek *hairesis*, a faction,

originally means “choice”) between logical possibilities. God is either one or three; He cannot be both. Christ is either divine or human; He cannot be both. Hence, the central use of logic for the heretics (for instance, A is different from non-A), as well as the appeal to what one can call meta-logical arguments among the orthodox. Eunomius (d. 393), for instance, had proposed a radical version of Arianism, according to which God’s unity demanded simplicity (i.e., one person), and only a moral, rather than an essential, similarity between creator and created. In their polemical treatises against him, the Cappadocian fathers (the cousins Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus) reckoned that he had logic on his side when dealing with the doctrine of the Trinity. They therefore resorted to slander, calling him a sophist, a dialectician, and a “technologist,” while referring to *musterion* in order to establish the orthodox conception of the relationship between Father and Son.[28] The Christian rationalization process will focus, then, on the logic of theological discourse.

The transformation of Christianity with the Constantinian revolution and its aftermath brought a new relationship with Judaism, now downgraded to the status of a tolerated religion (actually, almost a heresy), and hence new configurations of religion in the Empire. To some extent, rabbinic Judaism became perceived along the lines of official Christianity.[29] Yet, the structure of rabbinic Judaism is deeply different from that of patristic Christianity. Jewish identity remained protected by kinship rules, strict ritual limitations on permissible foods, and adherence to the Jewish calendar. This entailed a much lighter insistence on forging an orthodox theology than in the case of Christians. No less than patristic literature, the Talmudic tractates, which to a great extent preserve protocols of legal discussions, and which develop biblical hermeneutics established upon clear rules of interpretation (*ha-middot she-ha-Torah nidreshet bahen*), represent a rationalization process. At the same time, these tractates reflect the estrangement of Judaism from the Hellenistic culture with which it had been in close contact in the previous period. In Talmudic literature, however, legal texts remain irretrievably mixed with oral traditions and legends based upon biblical figures (*midrash haggada*). This literary phenomenon is strikingly different from anything in patristic literature.

Patristic Christianity and rabbinic Judaism can be perceived as emphasizing two different forms of the doctrinal mode of religiosity, the first written, the second oral. In these two cases, rationalization will follow

different patterns. The first pattern of rationalization, which may be called "discursive rationalization," is reflected, for instance, in the patristic theological and polemical treatises. Rabbinic Judaism, on the other hand, highlights religious praxis while playing down (but not ignoring!) beliefs and dogmas. We may call the pattern of rationalization at work in rabbinic Judaism "ritual rationalization." The first pattern emphasizes orthodoxy, while religious praxis remains in the background. The second focuses on orthopraxy, often keeping beliefs and dogmas implicit rather than explicit. The first will focus on fighting heresy, while the second will insist on the threat of schisms within the community.

Let us then imagine the two modes of religiosity in action in late antiquity. The dogmatic trend is easily recognizable in the building of both orthodoxy and orthopraxy in the different religious groups. The dogmatic mode of religiosity is reflected in what one can call the late antique scriptural movement. This expression follows a trend from the redaction of the New Testament and the Mishnah, through that of the Manichaean and Mandaean texts, up to that of the Qur'an. The centrality of books in late antique religion is far from limiting itself to canonical books. In late antique Christianity, books of different kinds play a major role: Apocryphal books of the New Testament, apologetic tracts, polemical writings against Jews, heretics, pagans, biblical commentaries, homilies, spiritual texts, etc. The doctrinal mode of religiosity finds here a major literary expression, and William Harris has even been able to speak of Christian "logorrhea."[30] Writing, however, was not central to all late antique religious traditions. Both rabbinic Jews and Sasanian Zoroastrians, for instance, seem to have been satisfied with their traditional scriptures, and sought to avoid writing other books, preferring a highly sophisticated system of oral traditions. In this context, we must remember that in the ancient world, a book could also remain oral, to be memorized rather than committed to writing: thus the "oral Torah," that is, the Mishnah, or the Avesta, which remained oral for a thousand years without significant changes, or even the Qur'an, which seems to have been transmitted orally for a short time before reaching its written form.

From the writings of the New Testament to the redaction of the Qur'an, a long list of texts is perceived as revealed, such as the Gnostic, the Manichaean, and the Mandaean scriptures. Others are considered to be endowed with the same legitimacy as that of revealed Scriptures, as for

instance the Mishnah and later both the Palestinian and the Babylonian versions of the Talmud, as well as some of the patristic tractates. Such writings have achieved a higher, almost canonical status granted to texts considered to be representatives of Jewish or Christian "mainstream," orthodox thought. In contradistinction to the new scriptures, this second category of texts essentially reflects hermeneutical efforts within a tradition, rather than a break with earlier tradition and the establishment of a new religious movement. In Jewish literature, one can include in this category, for instance, biblical Targumim and Midrashic collections (both *midrash halacha* and *midrash aggada*), where legends, usually about biblical figures, purport to offer interpretations of biblical passages. In patristic literature, genres are more clearly defined: theological treatises, biblical commentaries, homilies, spiritual pamphlets as well as letters. The commentaries written on Plato's works by Neoplatonist philosophers seem to have played a comparable role among the last communities of pagan philosophers, where they offered a warrant for orthodoxy.[31]

So far, we have dealt with two different forms of the doctrinal mode of religiosity, as expressed in patristic and in rabbinic literature. Whitehouse's second, imagistic mode refers to intensive or even ecstatic experiences linked to charismatic personalities. In the religions of the Mediterranean and the Near East, the long ecstatic and charismatic tradition is that of prophecy. The phenomenon was in existence, in different forms, in most religious traditions of the area during much of the first millennium BCE (e.g. the Bacchic maenads and their frenzy) and continued, sometimes under new garbs, in the first millennium CE. In our context, the second, imagistic mode of religiosity may hence be called, in an allusion to the title of Arthur Lovejoy's seminal book, *The Great Chain of Being*, "the great chain of prophecy." Although no one disputes the obvious fact that both Jesus and Muhammad must be understood within the same broad phenomenon continuing the tradition of the biblical prophets, the continuous trend of prophecy throughout late antiquity has not received all the scholarly attention it requires. Prophecy, obviously present in those religious movements originating in the biblical tradition, seems to have been rife also among pagans, as indicated by Lucian of Samosata's *Alexander the False Prophet*, a polemical and ironic work, in a rather Voltairian vein, on Alexander of Abonoteichos.

Both in the Greek and in the Hebrew traditions prophecy belongs to religious enthusiasm, in the strong sense of the word, and reflects the total possession of the individual by the divine spirit, being hence endowed with the intensity typical of Whitehouse's imagistic religiosity. While various religious systems grant a significant place to religious enthusiasm, all seek to limit its autonomous power, even its legitimacy. In Greece, ecstatic cults, such as that of Dionysus, remained marginalized and were never quite integrated into the official cult of the city. The suspicion of the Romans toward religious movements encouraging the expression of subjectivity is well known. In Weberian terms, religious enthusiasm represents the canalization of charisma into a new religious movement, as it grows and develops social structures. Enthusiasm soon enters into a conflicting relationship with ecclesiastical authority, eventually becoming identified with religious deviance, with heresy.

Some of the leading religious figures of the long late antiquity, from Marcus Magus and Montanus in the second century, through Mani in the third, and up to Muhammad, present themselves, each in his turn, as heirs of the prophetic tradition, bringing to an end the great chain of the biblical prophets and its apex in the prophecy of Jesus. For their opponents, the patristic heresiologists, these religious leaders were all impostors, false prophets.

[1] Shaul Shaked, James Nathan Ford, and Siam Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls*, vol. 1, Magical and Religious Literature of Late Antiquity, 1 (Leiden and Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2013).

[2] Dan Sperber, "Anthropology and Psychology: Towards an Epidemiology of Representations," *Man*, n.s. 20 (1985), 73–89 (p. 83). Sperber's important reflection on "epidemiology of representations" cannot be discussed here.

[3] R. W. Müller, "Rationalisierung," in *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*, Bd 4, ed. Hubert Cancik et al. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1998), pp. 262–76.

[4] Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. Hans Heinrich Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 129–56 (p. 139); quoted by Peter E. Gordon, "The Place of the Sacred in the Absence of God: Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 69 (2008), 647–73 (p. 652).

[5] Sperber, "Anthropology and Psychology," p. 89.

[6] See Guy G. Stroumsa, *Savoir et salut* (Paris: Cerf, 1992), 163–81 ("La gnose et le désenchantement chrétien du monde").

[7] See Guy G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology*, Nag Hammadi Studies, 24 (Leiden: Brill, 1984).

[8] On Clement, see for instance Salvatore Romano Clemente Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

[9] Much has been written on the topic, of course. I may refer here to Winrich Löhr, "Christian Gnostics and Greek Philosophy in the Second Century," *Early Christianity*, 3 (2012), 349–77. See further Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

[10] On Gnostic esotericism, see for instance Guy G. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism*, Numen Book Series. Studies in the History of Religions, 70, 2nd, rev. and enlarged ed. (Leiden and Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2005 [1996]).

[11] In this context, it may be worth remembering that the great Iranist Walter Bruno Henning considered dualist thought patterns had emerged as a protest against unconvincing monotheist theodicies. See W. B Henning, *Zoroaster, Politican or Witch-Doctor?* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 186.

[12] Paul Ricœur, *Philosophie de la volonté* (Paris: Aubier, 1948), p. 312.

[13] Adolph von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, Bd 1 (Freiburg: Mohr Siebeck, 1888), p. 163, n. 1. Cf. Christoph Markschies, *Hellenisierung des Christentums: Sinn und Unsinn einer historischen Deutungskategorie*, Forum Theologische Literaturzeitung, 25 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2012), pp. 54, n. 87, who notes that Franz Overbeck was at the origin of the statement.

[14] The impressive development of magic bowls across cultural and religious boundaries, precisely at a time when monotheism (or dualism, a variant of it) seems to become the prevalent discourse, remains puzzling. For Weber, disenchantment meant "the elimination of magic as a salvation technique." How does the omnipresence of the magical bowls in the late antique Near East sit together with what I have called a step in the disenchantment of the world is a problem which I cannot solve now, although one should remember that Weber's use of "magic," deeply ingrained in liberal Protestant theology of the late nineteenth century as it was, does not quite correspond to what we call magic today. See Shaked, Ford, and Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells*, Introduction, esp. pp. 1–8.

[15] On Alexander of Lycopolis's polemics against the Christians, see Alexander of Lycopolis, *Contre la doctrine de Mani*, trans. André Villey, Sources gnostiques et manichéennes, 2 (Paris: Cerf, 1985).

[16] See E. A. Judge, *Jerusalem and Athens: Cultural Transformation in Late Antiquity*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 265 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), p. 114.

[17] Markschies, *Hellenisierung des Christentums*, *passim*.

[18] Polymnia Athanassiadi, "From Man to God, or the Mutation of a Culture (300 B.C.–A.D. 762)," in *Heaven and Earth: Art of Byzantium from Greek Collections*, ed. Anastasia Drandakē, Dēmētra Papanikola-Mpakirtzē, and Anastasia G. Turta (Athens: Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports, 2013), pp. 28–43. See further Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede, *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) as well as Stephen Mitchell and Peter van Nuffelen, eds, *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010) and Stephen Mitchell and Peter van

Nuffelen, *Monotheism between Pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity* (Leuven and Walpole, Mass.: Peeters, 2010).

[19] One can think here, for instance, about the infatuation of the late Neoplatonists with the Chaldean oracles.

[20] See for instance Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002).

[21] On Justin's *logos spermatikos*, see Ragnar Holte, "*Logos Spermatikos*: Christianity and Ancient Philosophy according to St. Justin Martyr," *Studia Theologica* 12 (1958), 109–68.

[22] *De anima*, 20.

[23] *De testimonio animae*.

[24] On this phenomenon, see in particular Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

[25] See Harvey Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 2004), esp. ch. 4.

[26] Hence, perhaps, Whitehouse's rather counterintuitive use of "imagistic."

[27] See Harvey Whitehouse, "Graeco-Roman Religions and the Cognitive Science of Religion," in *Imagistic Traditions in the Graeco-Roman World: A Cognitive Modeling of History of Religious Research*, ed. Luther H. Martin and Panayotis Pachis (Thessaloniki: Equinox, 2009), pp. 1–13.

[28] See in particular Luise Abramowski, "Eunomios," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, Bd 6 (Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 1966), pp. 936–47.

[29] The recognition of this obvious fact has recently brought a number of scholars to claim that it is only in the fourth century that Judaism became a religion, or even that one cannot speak of religion, in any context, before the fourth century. It is striking that such an odd idea is today rather fashionable among students of late antique Judaism.

[30] William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

[31] On orthodoxy among the last Platonists, see Polymnia Athanassiadi, *La Lutte pour l'orthodoxie dans le platonisme tardif: De Numénius à Damascius* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2006).

Part II

The True Prophet

False Prophets of Early Christianity

I

The last chapter ended with the chain of late antique prophecy, culminating with that of Muhammad. We shall now seek to understand more precisely the phenomenon of late antique prophecy and its evolution. More precisely, we shall focus here on the idea of false prophecy in the *longue durée* of late antique Christianity. Prophecy belongs to religious enthusiasm, in the strong sense of the word, and reflects the total possession of the individual by the divine spirit. While various religious systems give a significant place to religious enthusiasm, all seek to limit its legitimacy.

Extravagant behavior within ecstatic or charismatic movements is well known in the ancient world. The frenzy of the Bacchic maenads comes immediately to mind. Ecstasy, or trance, on the part of religious virtuosi is also a well-known phenomenon.[1] E. R. Dodds noted long ago that the connection of prophecy and madness is as old as the religion of Apollo: "If the Greeks were right in connecting *mantis* with *mainomai*—and most philologists think they were—the association of prophecy and madness belongs to the Indo-European stock of ideas."[2] What Dodds did not say, however, is that the same closeness between prophecy and madness can be observed in a Semitic context. Israelite prophecy is here a classic example, with its connections with madness: "…for every man that is mad, and makes himself a prophet…" [*le-khol ish meshugaʿ u-mitnabe*], says Jeremiah (29:26), while Hosea (9:7) refers to "the prophet [who] is a fool, the spiritual man [who] is mad…" [*evil ha-navi, meshugaʿ ish ha-ruah*].

The false prophet, who uses his gifts *in malam partem*, is the natural complement of the true prophet, its negative counter-figure, as it were. It is also more directly connected to "madness." While the figure of the prophet has been the topic of a great many studies, that of the false prophet is certainly in need of further investigation. Such an investigation might permit a better understanding of the function of prophets in ancient religions, and of its transformation in late antiquity. Herodotus tells us that Scythian kings did not hesitate to execute any *pseudomantis* who had brought an unjust death sentence on somebody (IV.69). The concept of *pseudoprophētēs* appears in the Septuagint (LXX), but not in the Hebrew

Bible, where there is no mention of *nevi sheker*—in Hebrew the concept would appear only later.[3]

In the Hebrew Bible, the first *locus classicus* dealing with the figure of the misleading prophet, who deserves death, is Deuteronomy 13: 2–6; (cf. Deut. 18: 20):

> If there arise among you a prophet (*navi*; LXX *pseudoprophētēs*), or a dreamer of dreams, and gives thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spoke unto thee, saying, "Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them," thou shall not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams…And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death, because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God…

Similarly, in Jeremiah (6: 13) we read:

> For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet [*navi*, LXX *pseudoprophētēs*] even unto the priest every one deals falsely.

The link so clearly underlined by Deuteronomy between false prophecy and dream signals the deep suspicion towards dreams in both the Jewish and the Christian tradition. For Christian as for Jewish thinkers, dreams are more often than not considered as coming from Satan rather than stemming from a divine origin.[4]

The oldest text where one finds *neviei shikra* is a fragment from Qumran (4Q 339) which quotes a list of false prophets of Israel, of whom the first is Balaam ben Pe'or and the last seems to be Horkenos.[5] The concept reappears later, in the midrashic literature of late antiquity. If these prophets are false prophets, this is either because they call men to the service of other gods, or because their prophecies are not realized, or else because they are not worthy from a moral point of view, that is, because their problematic personal conduct prevents considering them as speaking in the name of God (see for instance Deut. 13: 1–6).[6]

The false prophet draws the boundaries of legitimate prophecy. Its figure and function can permit a more precise understanding of the role of prophets in the early stages of the new religion.[7] It might also help us to understand more precisely the ways in which monotheistic systems retain implicit mediums for change.[8] It would be an error to understand early Christian prophecy only within the framework of biblical prophecy. One

should not ignore the importance of various paths of divination, oracles, and prophecies in the Roman Empire. In the second century, Lucian devoted the longest of his essays to a man whom he considered to be a religious charlatan. He calls Alexander, the impostor of Abonoteichos, a false prophet, *pseudomantis*.[9] This Alexander has been also compared to his contemporary Montanus. Robin Lane Fox, for instance, argues that Montanus shows more religious imagination than Alexander.[10]

Since the LXX and Philo, biblical false prophets were identified in Hellenistic Judaism with pagan prophets. One can ask, however, whether the prominence of false prophecy and its juxtaposition with true prophecy is not typical of biblical monotheism, a radically simplified religious world in which the uniqueness of truth and of its source entails the existence, side by side with truth, of error and lie, in a way quite unknown in polytheistic systems. In a polytheist climate, a false prophet is simply a religious charlatan. In a monotheistic climate, on the other hand, any prophet who does not represent orthodoxy is a false prophet.[11] Hence, the dual opposition between true and false prophet is a characteristic of monotheist systems which has no real parallel in polytheist religions.

II

Some of the leading religious figures of the long late antiquity, such as Marcus Magus, Montanus, Mani, and Muhammad, present themselves, each one in his turn, as heirs of the prophetic tradition, as ending the great chain of prophecy starting with the biblical prophets, and reaching its apex with the prophecy of Jesus. For their opponents, the patristic heresiologists, these religious leaders were all impostors, false prophets. Like wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7: 15), they knew how to hide their pretensions under the cover of their prophetic charisma. They were all the more dangerous for this ability, since they were able to attract naïve believers to their diabolical teachings. Even religions established upon prophecy seek to put an end to active prophecy. In any new religious movement, what Max Weber called routinization soon takes over charisma, permitting the establishment of religious elites. The famous discussion in the Talmud on the sage being superior to the prophet[12] reflects this issue very clearly: since the closing of the age of prophecy, the sages are the only ones able to interpret the divine word. Thus, in Rabbinic Judaism as well as in ancient Christianity, since the age of prophecy is officially closed, one finds relatively few discussions on "the signs of prophecy," the criteria permitting to distinguish between true and false prophets. Yet, that Talmudic discussion also reflects the great difficulty, on the part of religious authorities, to close the channels of charisma.

For both Jews and Christians, the time of prophecy was now closed, at least in theory, just like the canon of their scriptures. Both Judaism and Christianity recognized, in principle, the fact of ecstasy: some people were able to "go out of themselves," to become united with the divinity, or to receive direct revelations from it. The need to draw some limits soon imposed itself, however. If ecstasy or prophecy comes too late, or from outside, or from a crooked inside, it is a wrong kind of prophecy. Ethics enters here the field of religion. The false prophet is the man who trespasses on established limits, following a traditional religious attitude, but whose legitimacy remains bound to the past. One can distinguish, then, between two kinds of impostors who claim falsely to be prophets: depending on

whether one can observe the activity of contemporary "true" prophets, or whether the period of prophecy is considered to be closed for ever.

But this "closure" of the age of prophecy in early Christianity did not happen at once. Indeed, the oldest strata of Christianity reveal the important role played by the "ambulant charismatics," those religious virtuosi of the first Christian generations studied by Gert Theissen, who insists on their similarities with Cynic philosophers. The early Christian prophets are one category of these ambulant charismatic teachers.[13] William Horbury, too, has noted the symmetry between the behavior of false prophets and that of itinerant philosophers such as the Cynics.[14] Yet, despite many studies on the oldest Christian texts, from the gospels and Paul's epistles to the *Didachē* and the *Shepherd* of Hermas, the role of Christian prophets in earliest Palestinian and Syrian Christianity remains rather uncertain. Scholars even disagree on the identity of the false prophets referred to by Matthew.[15]

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves (*prosechete apo tōn pseudoprophētōn hoitines erchontai pros humas en endumasin probatōn, esōthen de eisin lukoi harpages*)," Matt. 7: 15. This verse of the Sermon on the Mount is the main text from the gospels referring to the false prophets. In Matt. 24: 11, moreover, reference is made to the many false Christs and false apostles who will appear, luring believers. According to Hans Dieter Betz, the false prophets seem to have been Christians of pagan background, leaders of a Christianity of Paulinian type, freed from the Law. As noted by Betz, the expression "false prophets" is of course typical of a polemical discourse, but only, or at least in particular, within the monotheistic biblical tradition.[16] In such a perspective, the "false prophets" are the heretics from all sides, and the term is a collective term of opprobrium, similar to *minim*—a plurivalent term of opprobrium in rabbinic literature. Hence, there is no point in trying to identify them with any specific group, such as zealots, Pharisees, Essenes, "strict" Jewish-Christians, disciples of Paul, or antinomian Hellenists.[17]

In primitive Christianity, prophets have a well-defined place, together with apostles and doctors (1 Cor. 12: 27–8). Together with the false prophets, one will then find false doctors (2 Pet. 2: 1) and Antichrists (1 Jn 2: 18). Paul, in particular, insists on the gift of prophecy, which he includes among the spiritual gifts. "Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and

forbid not to speak in tongues." (1 Cor. 14: 29). For him, prophets are superior to those who speak in tongues, since they communicate their spiritual experience to other men (1 Cor. 14: 3). The importance of prophecy in early Christian literature directly entails that of false prophecy. In his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin Martyr mentions different imitators of the prophets, sent by the devil to all peoples: the false prophets of Israel at the time of Elijah, the magi in Egypt (*sic*), other anonymous imitators in Greece.[18] Justin adds that the false prophets are not only a phenomenon of the past, but that they are still active in his day among Christians.[19] This text echoes the discussion on false prophets in the *Didachē*, where the different criteria presented to differentiate between true and false prophets deal with the morality of the prophet concerned: if he settles with his hosts for more than two days without working, if he asks to be paid for his services, if he preaches truth but does not put what he says into practice, then he is a false prophet.[20] The same kind of argument can be found in the *Shepherd* of Hermas, *Mandate* 11.[21] In *Mandate* 11.7, for instance, the differentiation between the true and the false prophet is based upon their way of life (*apo tēs zōēs*). He who lives according to the Spirit will be meek, calm, and humble, and will avoid all evilness and low desire of this world (*Mandate* 11.8). The false prophet, on the other hand, is impudent, shameless, overly talkative, he lives in luxury, and demands to be paid for his prophecy (*Mandate* 11.12). Origen, however, tackles the same issue from a very different angle. In his *Contra Celsum*, he argues that ecstasy, madness, possession, and the loss of consciousness are all different elements indicating false prophecy. The true prophet retains a clear vision of things, even when he is in communion with the divinity, precisely because he refuses to let himself fall into an ecstatic state. Such an ecstasy is only too common in our cities, notes Origen, who mentions various kinds of prophets active in different cities.[22]

Marc the Gnostic, or Marcus Magus, was one of the early followers of Valentinus, around the middle of the second century.[23] He is presented by Irenaeus (who writes in the 180s) as a Gnostic Casanova of sorts, as Giovanni Filoramo has called him, a false prophet acting in guile and concocting love potions and magical charms in order to seduce beautiful and rich—but naïve—women.[24] After having offered them wine, Marcus asks them to prophesy, and when they argue that they have no prophetic

gifts, he tells them simply to utter meaningless syllables and sentences. Marcus, himself, according to Irenaeus, "prophesies through a demon."[25] He asks the women to open their mouths and say anything whatsoever and prophesy."[26] While various elements of Marcus's behavior can be shown to have parallels in the pagan *Umwelt*, some remarkable similarities between his conception of the cosmic "Body of Truth" (*sōma tēs alētheias*) and early Jewish esoteric traditions about the cosmic "Body of God" (*shiʿur qoma*) are too striking to be explained away, a fact pointed out long ago by Moses Gaster, followed by Gershom Scholem.[27]

Montanus, a Phrygian ecstatic teacher who flourished in the second half of the second century, launched the most famous prophetic movement of early Christianity. The anonymous anti-Montanist source which has been preserved for us thanks to Eusebius is our primary source of information about that important millenarian movement, which seems to have remained a significant threat to mainstream Christianity throughout communities, in the West as well as in the East, and over a significant period of time.[28] Like Marcus Magus, Montanus behaves like an ecstatic, speaking "strangely" and prophesying in ways that do not fit Church norms. The ecstatic character of Montanus, which reflects madness, is in itself an indication of the false character of his prophecy.[29] According to Epiphanius, Montanus sees himself as being a divine incarnation: "I am the Lord, dwelling in a man."[30] Such a self-perception underlines the false character of his prophecy: such a prophet must be a deceiver (*planos*).[31] His claim to be god reveals his possession by Satan. As is well known, and just as in Marcus's movement, female ecstasy plays a leading role in his movement. Eusebius quotes Alcibiades the Christian, according to whom a prophet need not speak in ecstasy. Montanism remained a violent sect for a long time: in the sixth century, Procopius will tell us how, during Justinian's campaign to erase any expression of religious dissent, officials would force Phrygian Montanists to give up their ancestral beliefs, which led to scenes of collective suicide by fire.[32]

Like Marcus Magus, Montanus reflects the continued presence of ecstatic phenomena among early Christian communities. Such phenomena were directly related to eschatological trends, but also to esoteric traditions. Despite the obvious importance of both the Gnostic and the Montanist challenges for early Christianity, it is among the Jewish-Christians, and in

particular among the Ebionites, who seem to have represented the core of early Jewish Christianity, that the problem of true and false prophecy was most clearly formulated.[33] For the Ebionites, this question was of cardinal importance. For them, Jesus himself, who by nature was human rather than divine, appeared as a prophet, the last prophet of a long series starting with Adam, rather than God's Messiah. It is, thus, upon the Ebionites that we should focus in order to understand the persistent recurrence of true and false prophecy throughout Near Eastern religious movements of late antiquity. Ebionite theology developed the concept of a "chain of prophets" throughout *Heilsgeschichte*. "They seek to comment on the prophecies with an excessive attention," notes Irenaeus.[34]

III

As is well known, the idea of prophecy is absolutely essential to Ebionite theology, in particular as it appears in the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*. For the Ebionites, the identity of Jesus is defined by his prophecy. Jesus is for them the last incarnation of the "true prophet," who, since Adam, from generation to generation, presents the divine message to mankind. In each generation, however, the true prophet is preceded by a false prophet, an impostor sent by Satan who masquerades as the true prophet. Truth and falsehood are thus for ever coupled, throughout the ages, in "syzygies" of opposites. The false prophets are "the prophets of this world," who remain forever ignorant of eternal truths.[35] Thus Cain precedes Abel, Ishmael precedes Isaac, Esau precedes Jacob, Aharon precedes Moses, and Paul precedes Peter. False prophets are feminine, and are born from women. Just as true prophecy stems from Adam, false prophecy stems from Eve. False prophets are impostors, who bring a false doctrine. Hence, a false gospel precedes the revelation of the true gospel.[36] Although this doctrine of the syzygies is well known, it has been granted too little attention in the context of polemics against false prophets in ancient Christian literature. If the many false prophets are so dangerous for mankind, it is because they mislead men, as they succeed in presenting error as truth, in order to ensure the acceptance of their doctrines (cf. Matt. 7: 15). Truth and error thus appear as mixed and a test is necessary in order to distinguish true prophets from impostors.[37]

The Elchasaites were a group of Jewish-Christians from Syria.[38] We know that they prayed toward Jerusalem (in contradistinction to "mainstream" Christian communities), and that they were practicing constant baptisms in order to remain pure. The lost *Book of Elchasai*, finally, which dates from the early second century, and which it was claimed had been written by the mythical founder of the sect, also mentions the insidious presence of false prophets "among us."[39] The central importance of Elchasaite traditions stems from the fact that thanks to the discovery and publication of the Cologne Mani-Codex, we now know that Mani grew up among Elchasaites, that is, a Jewish-Christian, baptist community, and that he revolted in his youth against its system of

practices.[40] Mani, indeed, conceived of his religious message as a return to the true belief distorted by the Jewish-Christian baptists of his youth. For the Christian heresiographers, from Epiphanius and the anonymous *Acta Archelai* to Augustine, who tell us much of what we know about him and his thought, Mani was a false prophet, a magician (*goēs*), and an impostor, who had learned his craft from his master Scythianus, trying in vain to accomplish true miracles. For the church fathers, his very name reveals his folly, his *mania*. [41] What is of direct interest to us here is that Mani's theology retains the conception of a succession of prophets from Adam to Mani—a conception which he manifestly got from the Elchasaites. The Manichaean conception, however, is more complex than the Ebionite one, as it involves not a single, but a *double* chain of prophecy. The concept of a "seal of prophecy" appears in some Manichaean texts, where the expression does not seem to refer to the fact that Mani is the last prophet sent to humankind, but refers, rather, to Mani's disciples, who are the "seal" of his prophecy, that is, they are the testimony and the proof of its authentic character.[42]

A double list of prophets, sent throughout history and to the different regions of the world, is typical of the Manichaean structure of prophecy. On the one hand, there is a diachronic list of prophets, from Adam to Christ to Mani, which includes prophets of the antediluvian times such as Enoch—but not the biblical prophets properly so called. The synchronic list, on the other hand, mentions Buddha in the East, Zarathustra in the central lands, and Jesus in the West, all preceding Mani. Each was sent only to one area of the world, while Mani, the only prophet to offer a total revelation, valid for all peoples in the entire *oikoumenē*, seals prophecy.[43]

As far as my knowledge goes, the Manichaean double chain of prophecy, both through the ages and through the universe, has always been considered by scholars to be an original theme, devised by Mani himself, the first thinker to have established a consciously universal religion. If my analysis above is correct, this *communis opinio* should be qualified. The Manichaean double chain of prophecy is strikingly reminiscent of Tatian's and Clement's conception of two chains of *barbaros philosophia*, that of the Hebrews and those of the Eastern barbarian peoples. The similarities between these two mythological frames seem too close to be the fruit of chance. It stands to reason, therefore, that the basic structure of Manichaean revelation throughout the generations and among the different cultures was

not a total novelty. Rather, it appears to be a new development, stemming from an already existing Christian scheme. This scheme was accepted, in particular, by those Christian thinkers who kept a particular interest in traditions of the East.

IV

Throughout the seventh century, as Islam was born and as the Muslim armies were conquering major areas of the Near East, a new wave of eschatological expectations among both Jews and Christians was arousing tensions between the two communities. The Jews were expecting the Messiah, who would deliver them from the yoke of Esau (the Christian Roman Empire). For them, the temptation was great to see, first in the Persians who conquered Jerusalem in 614, taking the Holy Cross into captivity, and then in the Muslims, who reached the Holy City in 636, their liberators, announcing the coming of the Messiah. The Christians, for their part, naturally looked at both Persians and Arabs as the Antichrist, ushering in the tribulations of the end times and announcing the Second Coming of Christ. For the Christians, the Messiah expected by the Jews would be the Antichrist, announcing Christ's *parousia*. There was then an obvious tendency for Jews and Christians alike to perceive Muhammad, who claimed to be a prophet, in their own theological terms. Was he, then, the Messiah, the Antichrist, a prophet, or a false prophet? I have dealt elsewhere with this polemic between Jews and Christians about the birth of Islam, with Jerusalem and the Temple Mount at its core.[44] Here, I can only insist that it is within this apocalyptic context that the earliest Islamic traditions should be understood. These traditions themselves reflect apocalyptic expectations, and the figure of the *dajjāl*, deceiver, impostor (cf. Greek *planos*), from Syriac *degala*, is but the Islamic counterpart of the Antichrist figure.

The false prophet, who according to Jewish-Christian traditions appears at different stages in history, each time preceding the coming of a true prophet, makes a final showing at the end of times. According to the book of *Revelation* (Rev. 13: 11 ff.), the false prophet is the lieutenant of the Antichrist: an enormous beast coming from the earth, but masquerading as a sheep, that is taking the appearance of justice. Simulacra, lying prodigies, and counterfeit prophecies reflect the character of this false messiah, who seeks to imitate, one last time, the deeds of Christ. As shown in the writings of Victorinus of Poetovio, the first Latin exegete, the false prophet, then, is also a central figure of Christian eschatological thought.[45] It is in this

eschatological context that one must understand the "false prophecy" of Muhammad.[46] The main accusation against Muhammad, throughout centuries of Christian anti-Muslim polemics, in the Middle Ages and until early modern times, has always been the accusation of false prophecy: Muhammad was an impostor who succeeded in appearing as a prophet. It is probably not too much to seek such a presence also in Muhammad's teaching.[47]

Like Mani, Muhammad saw himself as the "seal" of prophecy, perhaps not so much the end as the confirmation of the long list of prophets sent by God to humankind through the ages. Like Mani, again, Muhammad was perceived by contemporary Christian writers as a false prophet. John of Damascus, who writes in the monastery of Saint Sabbas in the Judean wilderness, dedicates to Islam ("the superstition of the Ishmaelites") the last chapter (101) of his book against heresies. John starts by calling the new heresy of the Arabs "a forerunner of the Antichrist," adding that from the time of Heraclius "to the present, a false prophet named Mohammed has appeared in their midst."[48] The Qur'anic conception of Muhammad as the "seal of the prophets" (*khātam al-nabiyyīn*; Qur'an 33: 40), then, inscribes itself within a long tradition, originally Jewish-Christian. Just as among the early Christians, it seems that cases of prophecy were rather frequent during the earliest stages of Islam, and that the conception of Muhammad as having closed the gates of prophecy did not immediately established itself as dogma. As Yohanan Friedmann has shown, the idea of a continued movement of prophecy after Muhammad can also be found in the earliest strata of Islam, just as in earliest Christianity.[49] It is only later that blossoming orthodoxy would seek to erase its traces.

In Chapter 4, we shall focus on the complex situation in the seventh century. In the Near East, in particular, the hermeneutical conflict between Jews and Christians over the expectation of the end was then exacerbated by the intense apocalyptic atmosphere created by the violence of the military conflict between the Byzantine and the Sasanian empires. The clash between the notions of true and false prophet, and of true and false messiah, sheds light on the milieu in which Islam arose and on its first crystallization.

[1] For pagan and Christian examples, see F. Pfister, "Ekstase," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, Bd 4 (Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 1959), pp. 944–87.

[2] E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 70.

[3] One does find *moreh nevi sheker* in Isaiah 9: 14, but Moshe Goshen-Gottstein has shown that it is a gloss, stemming from a *pesher*. See *Textus* 8. On false prophets in the Hebrew Bible, see Robert P. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed: Reactions and Responses to Failure in Old Testament Prophetic Traditions* (London: SCM, 1979). For earlier literature, see for instance M. Buber, "Falsche Propheten," in M. Buber, *Werke*, Bd 2: *Schriften zum Bibel* (Munich and Heidelberg: Kösel-Verlag 1964), 945–9; G. von Rad, "Die falschen Propheten," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 51 (1933), 109–20; G. Quell, *Wahre und Falsche Propheten: Versuch einer Interpretation* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1952); E. Osswald, *Falsche Prophetie im Alten Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1962). Cf. S. Paul, "Prophets and Prophecy," *Encyclopedia Judaica* 13, 1168–9, who points out the weakness of the differentiation criteria between true and false prophets as presented by the Deuteronomist.

[4] See Guy G. Stroumsa, *Barbarian Philosophy: The Religious Revolution of Early Christianity*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 112 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 204–27.

[5] See E. Qimron in *Tarbiz* (1994) [Hebrew].

[6] For Jewish Hellenistic literature, see for instance Jannes Reiling, "The Use of *pseudoprophètès* in the Septuagint, Philo and Josephus," *Novum Testamentum* 13 (1971), 147–56.

[7] D. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983). This learned book is of great value, but ignores the figure of the false prophet. Moreover, it does not deal with all aspects of the issue at hand. For instance, "madness" does not appear in the index. Moreover, there is no discussion of either Gnosis or Manichaeism. For a judicious and detailed review of this work, see G. Filoramo, "Riflessioni in margine al profetismo cristiano primitivo," *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa* (1998), 95–107.

[8] See D. Potter, *Prophets and Emperors: Human and Divine Authority from Augustus to Theodosius* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 5. See further G. Filoramo, ed., *Carisma profetico: Fattore di innovazione religiosa* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2003).

[9] For the text and English translation, see Lucian, *Works*, trans. A. M. Hamon, vol. 4, LCL (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1961). See further C. P. Jones, *Culture and Society in Lucian* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1986), 133–48. Cf. Chapter 1 "The End of Sacrifice".

[10] Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (Harmondsworth: Viking, 1986), Chapter 8 "Visions and Prophecy;" see esp. p. 406. On Montanus, see for instance Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity*, 313–16, and esp. Christine Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New Propphcy* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), with bibliography.

[11] See Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 208, and Quell, *Wahre und falsche Propheten*, 23.

[12] Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Bathra* 12a.

[13] Gerd Theissen, *The Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), pp. 8–16.

[14] William Horbury, J*ews and Christians in Contact and Controversy* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), pp. 111–26.

[15] See for instance Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3–7:27 and Luke 6:20–49)* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), who suggests that these false prophets are Gentile Christians who have abandoned the Law.

[16] Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 527–38.

[17] See Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 534.

[18] Justin Martyr, *Dial. Trypho*, 69.1.

[19] *Dial. Trypho*, 82.1–2.

[20] *Didachē* 11: 3–10; cf. 12: 1–2; 16: 3.

[21] See the important monograph of Jannes Reiling, *Hermas and Christian Prophecy: A Study of the Eleventh Mandate*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum, 37 (Leiden: Brill, 1973).

[22] Origen, *Contra Celsum* VII.9; cf. H. Chadwick's note on p. 402 in his translation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953).

[23] On Marc the Gnostic, see mainly Niclas Förster, *Marcus Magus: Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe: Sammlung der Quellen und Kommentar*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 114 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999).

[24] Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, I. 13–16. See in particular *Adv. haer.* I. 13. 1–5. I use the edition of A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau, Irénée, *Contre les hérésies, I*, Sources Chrétiennes, 264 (Paris: Cerf, 1979), pp. 188–265.

[25] *Adv. haer.* I. 13. 3–4 (Rousseau-Doutreleau).

[26] See Förster's commentary, *Marcus Magus*, pp. 112–16.

[27] See Guy G. Stroumsa, "Form(s) of God: Some Notes on Metatron and Christ," *Harvard Theological Review* 76 (1983), 269–88.

[28] On Montanus and the Montanist movement, see Trevett, *Montanism* and Laura S. Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy of Folly: Prophecy and Authority in the Early Church*, Harvard Theological Studies, 52 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003), as well as V.-E. Hirschmann, *Horrenda Secta: Untersuchungen zum frühchristlichen Montanismus und seine Verbindungen zur paganen Religion Phrygiens* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2005).

[29] See Eusebius, *Historia ecclesastica* V.16. On his ecstasy reflecting his madness, see Epiphanius, *Panarion* 4. 6.

[30] Epiphanius, *Panarion* 11. 1.

[31] Epiphanius, *Panarion* 48. 11. 5.

[32] Procopius, *Secret History* XI. 23.

[33] On Jewish-Christian theology, see mainly the seminal study of Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums*, Gesammelte Schriften, 2 (Hildesheim and New York: Olms, 1998 [Tübingen: Mohr, 1949]). See further Georg Strecker, *Das Judenchristentum in den Pseudoklementinen*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur, Bd

70, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1981 [1958]), as well as Simon Claude Mimouni, *Le Judéo-christianisme ancien: essais historiques* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1998).

34 Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* I.26.2; II, 346–7 (Rousseau-Doutreleau).

35 Ps.-Clement, *Homilies*, II.15.4.

36 Ps.-Clement, *Hom*. II.17.4. Cf. *Hom.* I.18.1–19.8; III.17.25.

37 See Ps.-Clement, *Hom*. I.19 and II.5.10. On the importance of syzygies in Ebionite theology, see in particular the work of Hans J. Schoeps, well synthesized in his *Jewish Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), pp. 88–91. On the "true prophet," see there pp. 68–73. It is worth noting here that a remarkably similar conception is found in a text from Nag Hammadi, the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth*. See Ch 4 "False Prophet and False Messiah."

38 On Elchasai, see Gerard P. Luttikhuizen, *The Revelation of Elchasai: Investigations into the Evidence for a Mesopotamian Jewish Apocalypse of the Second Century and its Reception by Judeo-Christian Propagandists* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1985). On Jewish-Christianity, see also ch. 8 "Jewish-Christians and Islamic Origins" below

39 Hippolytus, *Refutations* 9.15.3; Wilhelm Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha* II, 658, trans. R. M. Wilson (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1992).

40 See Guy G. Stroumsa, "Purification and its Discontents: Mani's Rejection of Baptism," in Stroumsa, *Barbarian Philosophy*, pp. 268–81. Reprinted in *The Religious History of the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews and Christians*, ed. J. A. North and S. R. F. Price (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

41 Epiphanius, *Panarion* 66; 20–6 Riggi. Similar etymology in the *Acta Archelai*.

42 See ch. 5 "Seal of the Prophets" below. See also C. Colpe, *Das Siegel der Propheten: historische Beziehungen zwischen Judentum, Judenchristentum, Heidentum und frühem Islam*, Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Theologie und Zeitgeschichte, 3 (Berlin: Institut Kirche und Judentum, 1990), 227–43. Colpe and I reached the same conclusions simultaneously, and independently of one another.

43 See ch 5 "Seal of the Prophets." The double chain of prophecy has been known for a long time from various Manichaean texts, but a new Coptic *Kephalaion* is most explicit:

> The Lord Zoroaster came in Persia to king Hystaspes. He has revealed the law still really established in Persia.
>
> The Lord Buddas the wise, the blessed: he came in the land of India and among the Kushans.
>
> He has revealed the law still really established in the whole of India and the Kushans. After him came Aurentes and Pkedellos in the East; they have revealed the law still really established in the East: the Middle of the world and Parthia; He has revealed the law of truth among all of them.
>
> Then Jesus Christ in the West of the Romans came to the whole land of the West.

See M. Tardieu, "La Diffusion du bouddhisme dans l'empire kouchan, l'Iran et la Chine d'après un kephalaion manichéen inédit," *Studia Iranica* 17 (1988), 153–82. As Tardieu points out, this very important text represents the oldest literary document on the expansion of Buddhism in the Kushan Empire. The Kushan Empire was from the late first to the third centuries CE an important Buddhist power, where Greco-Roman, Indian and Iranian cultures mixed to a remarkable extent, and was

known for its widespread cultural, artistic, and religious syncretism. Moreover, the *Kephalaion* emphasizes the formative importance of Buddhist influence in the early stages of Manichaeism.

[44] See ch. 4 below.

[45] See M. Dulaey, *Victorin de Poetovio: Premier exégète latin*, Études Augustiniennes (Paris: Institut d'études augustiniennes, 1993), vol. 1, pp. 204–6, vol. 2, p. 101.

[46] On Muhammad, see esp. John of Damascus, *Adv. haer.*, Heresy 101 (the last and worst heresy, according to the author, invented by the false prophet Muhammad, who, having learned some elements of biblical religion, convinced the pagan Arabs by simulating piety).

[47] See for instance C. Colpe, "Mohammed und Mani als Prophetensiegel," in his *Das Siegel der Propheten*: *Historische Beziehungen zwischen Judentum, Judenchristentum, Heidentum und frühem Islam*, Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Theologie und Zeitgeschichte (Berlin: Institut Kirche und Judentum, 1990), pp. 227–43, esp. p. 237–8.

[48] I use the edition of B. Kotter, *Die Schriften von Johannes von Damaskos*, Bd 4: *Liber de haeresibus, Opera polemica*, Patristiche Texte und Studien, 22 (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1981).

[49] See Y. Friedmann, "Finality of Prophethood in Sunni Islam," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 7 (1986), 177–215. The modern movement of the Ahmadyya was born in the late nineteenth century as a heretical movement arguing for an uninterrupted chain of prophecy *after* Muhammad. The Ahmadyya, too, shows that closing hermetically the era of prophecy remains an insurmountable challenge for religious elites. See Y. Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and its Medieval Background* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

False Prophet and False Messiah

I

In the last chapter, we dealt with prophecy and false prophecy in early and late antique Christianity. We should now turn our attention to the religious scene in the East at the time of the birth of Islam. The early Christian figure of the Antichrist, like that of Christ, owes much to concepts current among Jews from before the time of Pompey. There remain early traces of the myth of a messianic opponent, which would remain active throughout the Roman period.[1] While the birth of Christianity might well have been the most potent historical consequence of Jewish messianism, it was certainly not the last. Sometimes dormant, Jewish and Christian eschatological expectations never died out: Jewish messianic movements and Christian intense expectations of the *parousia*, or Second Coming of Christ, have punctuated the history of the two religions. In some cases, a combination of these two phenomena has had an explosive effect and some dramatic consequences. Such a combination occurred in seventh-century Palestine, and bears directly upon the earliest stages of Islam.

The present chapter seeks to highlight some aspects of Jewish and Christian late antique eschatological conceptions, in particular the figures of the false prophet and of the false messiah. More precisely, it will focus on conflicting beliefs and expectations regarding the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

As in our own days, there existed in the seventh century a direct link between messianism and geopolitics.[2] Of the two empires that clashed in the early years of the seventh century, one would disappear before the end of the century, to be replaced by a new one. The Byzantines were able to understand the Islamic invaders only as the bearers of a yet unknown kind of Christian heresy—a view clearly expressed by John of Damascus, in the first half of the eighth century.[3] The fundamental difficulty Christian intellectuals experienced in trying to understand Islam on its own terms points to the fact that what we call today the “clash of civilizations” was also a conflict of interpretations within the monotheistic traditions. This conflict, however, was not simply one between Christians and Muslims; it also involved the Jews, who sat on both sides of the political, cultural, and linguistic divide. While we still do not know much of the state of affairs in

Arabia, the importance of the presence of both Jews and Jewish religious ideas in pre-Islamic Arabia is now being recognized.[4] It remains difficult to identify precisely the kind of Judaism involved, although it probably did not include only what we have learned to recognize as rabbinic Judaism.

Prophecy was one of the central concepts over which polemics raged between the different groups claiming to possess wisdom and truth from divine revelation. For each group, the others' claim to knowledge was a false one, as it was based upon false prophecy—a concept into which Chapter 3 delved.

From the New Testament on, early Christian texts reflect a constant preoccupation with false prophets.[5] As we have seen, it is for the Jewish-Christians, and in particular for the Ebionites, that the problem of false prophecy was of crucial importance in the economy of salvation.[6]

A conception remarkably similar to that of the Ebionites is found in a text from Nag Hammadi, the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth*.[7] In this text, Adam, then Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon, the twelve prophets, Moses, and John the Baptist, are called "laughing stocks" (*sōbe*), as they have been created by the Hebdomad as so many imitations of the true prophets. This text probably reflects the Gnostic reinterpretation of a Jewish-Christian theologoumenon.

It is in this context that we must see the Christian perception of Mani, a false prophet and magician trying in vain to accomplish true miracles. For the heresiologists, his very name reveals his folly, his *mania*.[8] The chain of the true prophets is indeed a Jewish-Christian theologoumenon, which is found also in the Manichaean conception of the succession of prophets from Adam to Mani. But, as we have seen, the Manichaean conception is more complex, as it involves a *double* chain of prophecy.

After the Montanist crisis the possibility of Christian prophecy must have been much weakened, and relegated to heretical trends. Yet, the impressive resilience and continued impact of the topic of false prophecy shows that such movements were not quite marginalized. Since, for the rabbis, too, as we saw in Chapter 3, the age of prophecy was officially closed, one finds in rabbinic as well as in patristic literature relatively few discussions on "the signs of prophecy," the criteria which make it possible to distinguish between true and false prophets. Such discussions will become absolutely crucial in Islamic theological literature, as Muhammad

is defined as a prophet.[9] The main accusation against Muhammad, throughout centuries of Christian anti-Muslim polemics, in the Middle Ages and until early modern times, has always been the accusation of false prophecy: for both Christians (and also, to some extent, for Jews), Muhammad was an impostor, who succeeded in appearing as a prophet. As we shall discuss in Chapter 5, Muhammad is identified not simply as a prophet, but as the seal of the prophets, the *khātam al-nabiyyīn*, in the Qur'an, and in early Islamic thought. It should be noted that this expression seems to have meant, originally, "confirmation" rather than "end" of prophecy.[10] Actually, Muhammad is not the first to have used this expression, which already appears in Manichaean texts, where it is Mani's disciples who are the "seal" of his prophecy, that is, its testimony and authentication.

We have seen how the idea of true and false prophecy was absolutely central for Jewish-Christians. Indeed, for them (and, one must insist, for them only) there was almost an equivalence between the concept of prophet and that of messiah. We have known for some time that some Jewish-Christian groups remained in existence quite late, certainly in Palestine, until at least the eighth century, when John of Damascus, sitting in the monastery of Mar Saba in the Judean wilderness, testifies to their presence on the shores of the Dead Sea.[11] Shlomo Pines, for his part, has argued for the presence of a Jewish-Christian community in Jerusalem during the reign of Mu'awwiyah.[12]

The fact that these late Jewish-Christians might have been only small sectarian groups does in no way entail that they remained marginalized, having no impact on society at large. Warnings against Judaizing practices were common in seventh-century Christian literature, and might point to the continued presence and influence of Jewish-Christian groups. Thus, the *Doctrina Jacobi* reflects a preoccupation with Judaizers who observed the sabbath, as they were expecting the second coming of the Anointed One, that is, the Messiah (1.19).[13] It stands to reason, then, to postulate that they may have played some role in the polemic over true and false prophecy and messianism between Jews and Christians in the seventh century.

As Pines has pointed out, for instance, Abu Isa al-Isfahani (d. ca. 750), a leader of a Jewish sect who led a rebellion against the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwan, was probably influenced in his self-conception by Jewish-

Christian beliefs when he presented Jesus and Muhammad as true prophets.[14] Pines then asks himself whether "the views held on the evidence of the *Doctrina Jacobi* at the time of the advent of Islam may be regarded as a form of reaction to this event or may have preceded it, and perhaps at some stage helped to shape the beliefs of the followers of the new religion." He answers: "in our present state of knowledge, no conclusive answer to this complex of questions is possible."[15] A review of the evidence might shed some new light on the problem.

Since at least the Iranian conquest of Jerusalem in 614 and the taking of the Holy Cross into captivity, both Jews and Christians in Palestine felt they were living in apocalyptic times. The apocalyptic trends of early Christianity, which had become dormant in the aftermath of the Constantinian revolution, were reactivated. The Christian world was rife with expectations of the end of times, with its traditional imagery of cosmic war between the forces of light and those of darkness. In Averil Cameron's words, "Islam took shape within a context of extreme religious and cultural tension."[16]

The new "clash of civilizations" between the Christian and the Islamic imperial states was indeed nurtured in the cocoon of the Jewish-Christian conflict of interpretations, which only superficially appear to repeat in essence, and ad nauseam, old arguments over an issue decided long previously. The argumentation of these early polemics centered on the interpretation of biblical prophecies, and revolved mainly around the figure of Christ as the Messiah announced by the prophets of Israel. For Jews, the Messiah was yet to come, while for Christians, he was to return, this time in full glory, and establish his kingdom, at long last, over the earth. For the chiliasts of the first centuries, perhaps most clearly exemplified by Irenaeus, Jerusalem, and in particular the Temple Mount, would become, at the end of times, the epicenter of dramatic events at the cosmic level.[17] The chiliastic debate that had raged in the first Christian centuries focused on issues of inheritance of the Holy Land and restoration of the Jews to their own land.[18] Early Christian chiliastic expectations had very strong Jewish roots.[19]

A comparative study of late antique Jewish and Christian eschatology remains a desideratum, which should emphasize the differences as well as the similarities between the two movements: indeed, the political situation

of the Jews was vastly different from that of the Byzantine Christians. The former did not have anything to lose from the change of political and religious power, but they had much to gain and it was easier for them to bet on the new, previously unknown force. They could thus easily have placed their hopes of religious and political renewal in the Muslim conquerors.

For Byzantine Christians, the Messiah expected by the Jews would be the last impostor, the Antichrist. From the fourth century on, Jews, on the other hand, held that believers in a false messiah ruled them. Victory for one side meant defeat for the other: a zero-sum game, in modern strategic terminology. The clearest expression of a Jewish vindication would be the re-establishment of the Temple. For Christians, such a threat was tantamount to the coming of the Antichrist, who had been described, in Irenaeus's classic version of the myth (in the very last chapters of *Adversus Haereses*, book V), as well as in the slightly later version by Hippolytus, as establishing his throne, for three and a half years, until he would finally be defeated by Jesus Christ, in the Temple itself. For the Christian psyche, such a threat did not belong only to the ancient past. The memories of the great anxiety generated by Julian's authorization to rebuild the Temple in 361, and the fact that work had actually started before a providential earthquake had brought these efforts to naught, do not seem to have quite disappeared for a long time.[20] In the seventh century, with the violent Iranian conquest and its deeply humiliating result for the Byzantines, the Holy Cross in enemy custody, and the new wave of successful invasion by the barbarian Arabs, the old questions were raised again, with a new urgency.[21] Who could these Arabs really be, the Christians asked themselves, who stemmed from their southern desert, claiming to follow the lead of their prophet? Could they not really represent, in disguise, the powerful arm of the Jews, sent to reclaim their pretensions on the Holy Land and in the Holy City? Paradoxically, the great fear of the Christians had more to do with the shadow of the Jews than with the Arab invaders.

The Byzantines were slow in understanding the true faith of the new conquerors. The Arabs remained for them, for too long, barbarians coming from the desert, and Muhammad was perceived as a false prophet whose faith could be understood only in the categories of Christian theology, namely as a heresy.[22] What would eventually settle down, for centuries, as a deep-seated political and religious conflict, sometimes more overt, sometimes relatively dormant, had started as a "big bang." This "big bang"

was epitomized, more than anything else, by Omar’s conquest of Jerusalem and the ensuing dramatic changes in the religious topography of the city.

II

For the Jews, the end of Christian domination offered a chance, or so they thought, to rebuild the Temple.[23] Since its destruction by Titus in 70 CE, they had never given up on the hope that it would be rebuilt one day. The Christians could not have envisaged the possibility of the Jerusalem Temple being rebuilt with equanimity. For them, such an event would be tantamount to the belated victory of the despised old religion. It is often assumed that the coming of the Arabs meant the end of Jewish hopes in the city.[24] Such a view, however, reflects the eventual outcome of Islamic rule, compressing and flattening the dramatic events of the seventh century. For some time, at least, it seems that the Arab invasion presented the Jews with a new chance of really getting rid of the hated Byzantines, and an opportunity to rebuild their Temple.

A generation ago, Patricia Crone and Michael Cook showed, in their groundbreaking *Hagarism*, the extent to which it is as the product of the preaching of Judaic Messianism in a gentile environment that earliest Islam must be understood.[25] In recent years, important epigraphic studies have done much to sharpen our perception of the Jewish element in the Arabian background of Muhammad's preaching. Christian Robin notes the importance, as revealed by these findings, of both Jewish presence and Jewish ideas in the Arabian peninsula as early as the fourth century. For him, this fact weakens the need for appealing to Jewish ideas imported from Palestine, as proposed by Crone and Cook.[26] I wish to take here another perspective, and to emphasize the cross-fertilization of Jewish and Christian beliefs in the Holy Land. In particular, the focus should be on the eschatological expectations of both Jews and Christians about the Temple Mount.[27]

In recent years, much scholarly effort has been spent on analyzing the complex relationship between Jews and Christians in seventh-century Byzantium.[28] In a series of important publications, distinguished Byzantinists such as Gilbert Dagron, Averil Cameron, Cyril Mango, and Vincent Déroche have done much to provide us with a clearer understanding of the complex interface between Jews and Christians in the seventh century, in particular from the perspective of the Greek texts.[29]

These and other scholars have underlined the renewed importance of polemics between Jews and Christians in the Eastern Roman Empire of the seventh century. In particular, they were able to highlight the centrality of the Holy Land, of the Holy City, and of its core, the Temple Mount, in these polemics. Moreover, they were able to emphasize the direct impact of these polemics on the earliest stages of Islam. The spiritual demotion of *vetus Israel* by *verus Israel* had been visualized by the relocation of the sanctified locus, from the Temple Mount, whose emptiness should remain striking, visible to all, to the new basilica of the Anastasis. Oleg Grabar has called this process of relocation an *eislithōsis*,[30] while Annabel Warthon has referred to the Byzantine *erasure* of the Jewish dimension of Jerusalem.[31]

More work, however, is needed on a careful synoptic analysis of both the Christian and the Jewish sources, in Hebrew and Aramaic as well as in Greek and Syriac. The Jewish sources, in particular, are much less well understood than the Christian ones. For some of the most important ones, such as the *Book of Zerubbabel*, we even lack a critical edition, and the texts are difficult to date with precision.[32] A synoptic view of all the available sources relevant to the renewed tensions between Jews and Christians in seventh-century Jerusalem could shed new light on the cultural and religious tensions which were in the background of the emergence and early development of Islam.[33]

The Islamic conquest of Jerusalem in 638 rekindled at once the fears of the Christians and the hopes of the Jews, bringing them to new levels of intensity. The conquerors, seeking to do what we could call, in the Hegelian sense, a suppression or *Aufhebung* of both Judaism and Christianity, moved back its sacred core from the Basilica of the Anastasis to the Temple Mount. For the Byzantine historiographer Theophanes, it was Omar's devilish pretense which made him seek to emulate Solomon.[34] Other sources indicate, indeed, that the Muslim building activity on the Mount was at first perceived by some Jews and Christians, as an attempt at rebuilding the Jewish Temple.[35] Anastasius of Sinai refers to "those who think and say that it is the Temple of God (*naos theou*) being built now in Jerusalem."[36] Such a perception is reflected very early, and can be found both in the *Coptic Apocalypse of Shenute* and in the *Secrets of Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai*.[37] Of course, what was perceived as a tragedy by the Christians was considered a divine miracle by the Jews.

It should come as no surprise that, for both Jews and Christians, architectural structures on the Temple Mount erected in the name of the God of Abraham would be understood as the direct inheritance of Solomon's Temple. What is more striking is that the same structures were understood in the same light by the Muslims themselves. A number of early Islamic sources indicate quite clearly that the Muslims attempted to rebuild the Temple as a mosque and that in the Umeyyad period, up to the early ninth century, the Temple Mount was considered to be both the Temple rebuilt and the Mosque of Jerusalem. As shown by Andreas Kaplony, it is only with the Abbasids that the conception of the Temple fell into oblivion, the Haram thus losing some of its charisma.[38] Until then, the very architecture stressed the direct relation of the Haram to the Temple. For instance, it integrated pieces of bedrock and ruins, in particular inside the Dome of the Rock. The latter was "specially loaded" with Temple traditions. Kaplony stresses that the assertion that the Haram is the rebuilt Temple and continues the Byzantine idea that the emperor builds a new Temple, thereby declaring himself the legitimate heir of King David. This is certainly true. Kaplony adds, however, and this is more directly relevant to my argument, that the rebuilding was directly aimed at a Jewish public that was expecting the eschatological Temple at the end of time. In such a mindset, the Caliph could also be perceived by the Jews as their expected Messiah. Attitudes changed when it became clear, however, that the Muslims did not intend to rebuild the Jewish Temple, but rather to build a structure of their own. For the Jews, the construction of a new kind of temple, rather than the reconstruction of Solomon's Temple, would have been perceived as no less shocking than the Christian total lack of interest in the Temple Mount and the transfer of the sacred place to the basilica of the Anastasis. Moreover, as the Anastasis remained standing, it would retain its sacredness (although a lesser one, of course, under the Islamic regime). Building activity, however, did not remain the privilege of the conquerors. The seventh-century Armenian historian Sebeos, one of our best sources, indicates that the Jews started to build a synagogue on the Temple Mount in the first years after the conquest. It is only later that the first Al-Aqsa mosque seems to have been built.[39]

The Jews could have perceived Muhammad either as a prophet or as the Messiah. Both these titles, indeed, had been attached in the Hebrew Bible to non-Israelite figures, such as Balaam or King Cyrus, who had been called

“God’s anointed” (Isaiah 45:1). The Jewish sources from Arabia are scarce and difficult to interpret, but it seems that some Jews, at least, did see in Muhammad, at first, a messianic (or a pre-messianic) figure. Now, according to the *Doctrina Jacobi*, a crucial Greek document from the very first days of the Islamic conquests, the Jews considered Muhammad to be a false prophet (*pseudoprophētēs*). In this text, we read that “the Jews speak of a prophet from the Saracens, and consider him a false prophet, because of his massacres.” In the same passage, Abraham, a Palestinian Jew, says that “a false prophet has appeared among the Saracens. He is proclaiming the advent of the anointed one who is to come.”[40]

It is, of course, possible to understand this literally, although it seems that in the seventh century the Jews thought more in messianic than in prophetic terms. Indeed, the concept of a false prophet seems to be almost totally absent from rabbinic literature.[41] And in the mid-seventh century, the *Sefer Zerubbabel* uses a very rare term, *mashiaḥ sheker*, false Messiah.[42] The Syriac *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius, a contemporary text destined to exert a powerful influence, in East and West, also mentions how the “son of perdition, false Messiah (*meshiḥa degala*) will enter Jerusalem and sit on God’s throne.”[43] *Degala*, here, seems to be at the origin of the figure parallel to the Antichrist in Islamic eschatological texts, the *Dajjal*.[44] Similarly, the *Edessene Apocalyptical Fragment* (dating from 683) refers to the appearance, at the end of time, of the son of perdition, who is named “false Messiah.”[45] The Antichrist of early Christian literature had become the false Messiah of the late antique Jewish sources.

One may then suggest also another possible interpretation of this testimony. Some Jews might have considered Muhammad, at first, to be the Messiah. Later, they would have called him a false messiah, when they realized that he had not brought about a fulfillment of the promises. Christians could not possibly understand what the term “Messiah” meant, since *Christos* was the name of the Savior, and might have understood this term as identical to “false prophet.” For Christians, Muhammad could only be a *pseudoprophētēs*. Thus, Theophanes relates how some Jews took Muhammad, the leader and false prophet (*archēgos kai pseudoprophētēs*) of the Saracens, to be “the Messiah who is expected by them.”[46] The language of this passage shows quite clearly that the Christians could think of

Muhammad only in terms of the category of prophecy, while for the Jews, it was the Messianic expectation that was most pregnant.[47]

The main thrust of the polemics between Jews and Christians, then, had evolved since second century, when Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* emphasized the idea of prophecy. In the seventh century, the emphasis was not so much on true prophecy as on messianism: the *Endzeit* was now of more immediate importance than in the past. While in its earlier stages, Jewish-Christian polemics had dealt with false prophecy, it aimed now at identifying the false messiah, the impostor of the end times. The mythological images inherited from the earliest Christian texts emerged with renewed power. The son of perdition sitting in the Temple of the Lord (2 Thess. 2: 4) became a direct inspiration for Pseudo-Methodius's *Apocalypse*.

The intense discussion between Jews and Christians reflected in the *Doctrina Jacobi* is not about prophecy, but about the coming of the Messiah and the messiahship of Jesus. For Ioustos, who comes "from the East," the first coming of Christ meant the end of prophecy (*Doctrina Jacobi* 3.8). For the author of this work, as for the *Trophies of Damascus*, a text from the late seventh century, the Jews still expect "their Christ."[48] A similar view is expressed by Jacob of Edessa, in his *Letter to John the Stylite* (written around 708). The figure of the Messiah (*mashiḥa*) is fundamental for Jews, Christians, and also Muslims. The Jews, however, contend that he has not yet come, while the Muslims do not consider Jesus to have been the Son of God, but rather a prophet, announced by the prophets.[49]

In his *Letter 14*, dated from 634, Maximus Confessor expects the imminent coming of the Antichrist, who will announce the Second Coming, or *parousia*, of Christ. Another of his letters, from 632, is replete with eschatological context.[50] The so-called Coptic *Apocalypse of Shenute* (from about 644) mentions that a figure arising from the sons of Ishmael will hound the Christians and will seek to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, announcing the end of times, while the Jews will expect the deceiver.[51] Toward the end of the century, the Syriac *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Ephrem (probably written after 692) mentions the messenger (*izgada*) of the son of perdition among the offspring of Hagar, while John of Damascus refers to the people-deceiving cult (*thrēskeia*) of the Ishmaelites, a forerunner of the Antichrist.[52]

Some Jewish sources concur in perceiving Muhammad as a prophet announcing the redemption of Israel. In the *Secrets of Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai* (probably written after 680), the archangel Metatron is quoted as saying:

> In order to save you from Edom, God raises over the Ismaelites a prophet according to His will…The second king who arises from Ishmael will be a lover of Israel…he restores their breaches and the breaches of the Temple. He hews Mount Moriah, makes it level and builds a mosque (*hishtaḥawaya*, for ritual prostration) there on the Temple rock.[53]

Indeed, Sunni and Shi'i sources relate that a Yemenite Jew named "Abdallah b. Saba" was the first to proclaim publicly that Muhammad himself was the Messiah who would return at the end of times.[54]

Our sources, then, do not offer a single and clear-cut image of Muhammad, who can be perceived either in the category of prophet or in that of Messiah. As we have seen, however, there was one religious group that retained a place for the coming of a false prophet at the end times, announcing the last and true prophet, the Messiah. I refer here to the Jewish-Christians, in particular to the Ebionites. In this respect, the "Jewish-Christian" formulations and Docetic conceptions in the Qur'an deserve fresh consideration. The perception of Muhammad as a false prophet in an eschatological context suggests, then, that this theologoumenon was developed in a Jewish-Christian milieu.

In the intense revival of competition for the holy places (and in particular for the Temple Mount) between Jews and Christians, what was a messianic hope for the former represented the threat of eschatological nightmare for the latter. What is of special interest, in our present context, is the interplay between the eschatological visions of both Jews and Christians.[55] This chapter has sought to show, through a particularly pregnant example, the historical recurrence of mythical thought patterns inherited from early Jewish eschatology and messianism. The chain of prophecy ends with the last and true prophet: Jesus for the Jewish-Christians, Muhammad for the Muslims. For the latter, Muhammad, "the seal of prophecy," is usually understood as "the last prophet." As we shall see in Chapter 5, this expression has a highly interesting pre-Islamic history.

[1] See William Horbury, "Antichrist among Jews and Gentiles," in *Jews in a Graeco-Roman World*, ed. Martin Goodman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 113–33. For an excellent

collection of the early Christian texts on the Antichrist, with translation and notes, see James Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Gian Luca Potestà and Marco Rizzi, *L'Anticristo*, vol. I: *Il nemico dei tempi finali: Testi dal II al IV secolo* (Milan: Mondadori, 2005).

[2] On geopolitics in the seventh century, as perceived in the Byzantine world, see Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis*, as well as Glen Warren Bowersock, *Empires in Collision in Late Antiquity* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2012).

[3] See Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam. The "Heresy of the Ishmaelites"* (Leiden: Brill, 1972); see ch. 10 "Barbarians or Heretics?"

[4] See ch. 8 "Jewish-Christians and Islamic Origins."

[5] In the New Testament, see in particular Matt. 7: 15, 1 Cor 12: 27–8, 1 John 2: 18, 2 Pet. 2: 1. Further referencees include *Didachē* 11: 3–10 (cf. 12: 1–2; 16: 3); *Shepherd of Hermas*, *Mandate* 11.7–8, 11; Justin Martyr, *Dial. Trypho*, 69.1; Origen, *Contra Celsum*, VII. 9. William Horbury has called attention to the symmetry between the behavior of false prophets and that of itinerant philosophers such as the Cynics; see William Horbury, *Jews and Christians in Contact and Controversy* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), pp. 111–26.

[6] See ch. 3 "False Prophets of Early Christianity".

[7] Cairoensis Gnosticus VII.2. 62–3. Cf. ch. 3 "False Prophets of Early Christianity", n. 37.

[8] Epiphanius, *Panarion* 66. A similar etymology is found in the *Acta Archelai*.

[9] See Sarah Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam: Ibn Al-Rawāndī, Abū Bakr Al-Rāzī and their Impact on Islamic Thought* (Leiden and Boston, Mass.: Brill, 1999), pp. 22–4 and notes 16, 23.

[10] See Yohanan Friedmann, "Finality of Prophethood in Sunni Islam," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 7 (1986), 177–215.

[11] See Guy G. Stroumsa, "Gnostics and Manichaeans in Byzantine Palestine," in *Studia Patristica*, 18, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Press, 1985), pp. 273–8. See further, ch. 8 "Jewish-Christians and Islamic Origins."

[12] See Shlomo Pines, "Notes on Islam and on Arabic Christianity and Judaeo-Christianity," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4 (1984), 135–52.

[13] The best edition of this important text is that of Déroche: "Doctrina Jacobi," ed. Vincent Déroche, in *Travaux et Mémoires*, 11, (Paris: de Boccard, 1991) pp. 69–219.

[14] Shlomo Pines, "The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity according to a New Source," in *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* (Jerusalem: The Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1966), 2(13), 237–310. Cf. Joshua Starr, "Le Mouvement messianique au début du VIIIe siècle," *Revue des Études Juives* 102 (1937), 81–92.

[15] Pines, "The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity," p. 152.

[16] Averil Cameron, "The Eastern Provinces in the Seventh Century: Hellenism and the Emergence of Islam," in *Hellēnismos: Quelques jalons pour une histoire de l'identité grecque: Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, 25–27 octobre 1989*, ed. Suzanne Saïd (Leiden and New York: E. J. Brill, 1991).

[17] See Irenaeus, *Adv. haer*. V. 25–30.

[18] See Stefan Heid, *Chiliasmus und Antichrist-Mythos: eine frühchristliche Kontroverse um das Heilige Land*, Hereditas. Studien zur Alten Kirchengeschichte, 6 (Bonn: Borengässer, 1993).

[19] For a recent study of a particularly interesting aspect of early Christian eschatology, see L. Vianès-Abou Samra, "L'Eschatologie d'Apollinaire de Laodicée à travers les fragments sur les Psaumes," *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 21 (2004), 331–71.

[20] See Robert Louis Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

[21] See Walter Emil Kaegi, *Heraclius, Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 79–80, 204–7.

[22] See Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1997). On Muhammad, see esp. John of Damascus, *Adv. haer*., Heresy 101 (the last and worst heresy, according to the author, invented by the false prophet Muhammad, who, having learned some elements of biblical religion, convinced the pagan Arabs by simulating piety).

[23] On the state of Byzantine Jewry in the seventh century, see Joshua Starr, "Byzantine Jewry on the Eve of the Arab Conquest (565–638)," *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 15 (1935), 280–93. We shall come back to the question of the Temple in the seventh century in ch. 9 "Christian Memories and Dreams of Jerusalem."

[24] See for instance Averil Cameron, "The Trophies of Damascus: The Church, the Temple and Sacred Space," in *Le Temple lieu de conflit: actes du colloque de Cartigny, 1991, Centre d'étude du Proche-Orient ancient (CEOPA), Université de Genève*. (Leuven: Peeters, 1994), pp. 203–12, esp. p. 204.

[25] Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

[26] See C. J. Robin, "Le Judaïsme de Himyar," *Arabia* 1 (2003), 97–172.

[27] On the Temple Mount and its complex and highly charged religious significance, see ch. 9 "Christian Memories and Dreams of Jerusalem" below.

[28] See for instance Günter Stemberger, "Jerusalem in the Early Seventh Century: Hopes and Aspirations of Christians and Jews," in *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Lee I. Levine (New York: Continuum, 1999), pp. 260–70.

[29] See for instance Gilbert Dagron and V. Déroche, "Juifs et chrétiens dans l'Orient du VIIe siècle," in *Travaux et Mémoires*, 11(Paris: de Boccard, 1991), pp. 17–274.

[30] Oleg Grabar, "Space and Holiness in Medieval Jerusalem," in *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Lee I. Levine (New York: Continuum, 1999), pp. 275–86.

[31] Annabel Wharton, "Erasure: Eliminating the Space of Late Ancient Judaism," in *From Dura to Sepphoris: Studies in Jewish Art and Society in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lee I. Levine and Zeev Weiss (Portsmouth, R.I.: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2000), pp. 195–213.

[32] See I. Lévi, "L'Apocalypse de Zorobabel," *Revue des Études Juives* (1914), 129–60.; I. Lévi, "L'Apocalypse de Zorobabel," *Revue des Études Juives* (1919), 108–21; I. Lévi, "L'Apocalypse de Zorobabel," *Revue des Études Juives* (1935) 280–93. See further Joseph Dan, "Armilus: The Jewish

Antichrist and the Origins and Dating of the Sefer Zerubbabel," in *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Mark R. Cohen (Leiden and Boston, Mass.: Brill, 1998), pp. 73–104; Martha Himmelfarb, "The Mother of the Messiah in the Talmud Yerusahlmi and Sefer Zerubbabel," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Catherine Hezser (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), pp. 369–89.

[33] Averil Cameron, "Blaming the Jews: The Seventh-Century Invasions of Palestine in Context," in *Mélanges Gilbert Dagron*, ed. V. Déroche, Travaux et Mémoires, 14 (Paris: de Boccard, 2002), pp. 57–78.

[34] See Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. Carl de Boor (Leipzig: Teubner, 1883); *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD 284–813*, ed. Cyril A Mango and Roger Scott, with the assistance of Geoffrey Greatrex (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[35] Vincent Déroche, "Polémique anti-judaïque et émergence de l'Islam (7e–8e siècles)," *Revue des Études Byzantines* 57 (1999), 141–61 (p. 158); cf. B. Flusin, "Démons et sarrasins: L'auteur et le propos des Diègèmata Stèriktika d'Anastase Le Sinaïte," in *Travaux et Mémoires*, 11 (Paris: de Boccard, 1991) pp. 381–410 (p. 408).

[36] Anastasius of Sinai, *Narrationes*, C3, quoted by Robert G. Hoyland, "The Earliest Christian Writings on Muhammad: An Appraisal," in *The Biography of Muhammad: The Issue of the Sources*, ed. Harald Motzki, Islamic History and Civilization, 32 (Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2000), pp. 277–97 (p. 289 and n. 54).

[37] See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, pp. 279–82. (Ps. Shenute) and 308–12 (Secrets of Sh. Bar Yohai).

[38] Andreas Kaplony, "635/638–1099: The Mosque of Jerusalem (Masjid Bayt al-Maqdis)," in *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Jerusalem's Sacred Esplanade*, ed. Oleg Grabar and B. Z. Kedar (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press; Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), pp. 100–31 and 396–8.

[39] Sebeos, *History*, trans. R. Badrosian (New York: Sources of the Armenian Tradition, 1985) ch. 31.

[40] *Doctrina Jacobi*, V.16, in Déroche, *Studia Patristica*, 11, pp. 203–9.

[41] See, however, Mishnah, *Sanhedrin* 11: 1, 5, 6 and Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 99a.

[42] *mashiaḥ sheker, dover kazav ve-tefel ve-mirmah*. See Lévi, "L'Apocalypse de Zorobabel." We possess only remnants of what must have been a whole Jewish literature dealing with the Messiah from that period. See for instance A. Marmorstein, "Les Signes du Messie," *Revue des Études Juives*, 52 (1906), 176–86.

[43] 13.21, p. 43; 14.10, p. 47. I quote according to Reinink's edition, Pseudo-Methodius, *Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 540–1.; Scriptores Syri, 220–1 (Leuven: E. Peeters, 1993). On Pseudo-Methodius's *Apocalypse*, see various studies by G. J. Reinink, collected in his *Syriac Christianity under Late Sasanian and Early Islamic Rule*, Variorum Collected Studies Series, 831 (Aldershot, Hants and Burlington, Vt: Ashgate/Variorum, 2005). See also Andrew Palmer, Sebastian P. Brock, and Robert G. Hoyland, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), pp. 222–42. On the powerful and long-lasting influence of this text on Western medieval eschatology, see Hannes Möhring, *Der Weltkaiser der Endzeit: Entstehung, Wandel und Wirkung einer tausendjährigen Weissagung* (Stuttgart: Thorbecke, 2000).

[44] See Chaim Rabin, *Qumran Studies* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), esp. p. 120.

[45] See Palmer, Brock, and Hoyland, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles*, pp. 243–53, esp. p. 247.

[46] *ton par' auton prosdokomenon Christon*, Theophanes, *Chronographia*, p. 333. See also Theophanes, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, pp. 464–5.

[47] Cf. Bernard Lewis, "An Apocalyptic Vision of Islamic History," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 13 (1950), 308–38. Muhammad was perceived by some Jews as either the Messiah or his precursor.

[48] *ho Christos autōn erchomenos*, IV.2; *ho erchomenos ēlimmenos hymōn*, IV.3. I quote according to *Les trophées de Damas: controverse judéo-chrétienne du VIIe siècle*, ed. Gustave Bardy (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1927), pp. 242–3.

[49] See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, pp. 160–7.

[50] On both of these letters, see G. Dagron, "Introduction historique: Entre histoire et Apocalypse 38–41," in *Travaux et Mémoires*, 11 (Paris: de Boccard, 1991); cf. ch. 4 "False Prophet and False Messiah," n. 29.

[51] See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, pp. 308–12.

[52] *De Haeresibus* 60–1.

[53] See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, pp. 308–12.

[54] See Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 55, who refers to studies by J. Van Ess and I. Friedländer.

[55] See Oded Irshai, "Dating the Eschaton: Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic Calculations in Late Antiquity," in *Apocalyptic Time*, ed. Albert I. Baumgarten, Numen Book Series. Studies in the History of Religions, 86 (Leiden and Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2000), pp. 113–55.

Seal of the Prophets

I

Mani, the “prophet of light” from third-century Mesopotamia, considered as a false prophet and an arch-heretic by Christian heresiologists, has already appeared here. Mani became the founder of a radically dualist religion whose missionaries succeeded in establishing Manichaean communities from the Western Mediterranean to China. In some places, these communities survived for a whole millennium. There is no reason not to include Manichaeism, side by side with other religious trends of late antiquity, in the religious worldviews that had a significant impact upon the formation of the Qur’an and Islamic origins. This chapter will essentially probe one specific trail in this respect.

Only once is Muhammad referred to as “seal of the prophets” in the whole Qur’an: “Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but the Apostle of God (*rasūl Allah*) and the seal of the prophets (*khātam al-nabiyyīn*)” (Qur’an 33: 40). Yet, this conception is of cardinal theological significance in Islam. The usual interpretation of the expression, both in traditional Islamic exegesis and in modem scholarship, takes it to signify “the last prophet” to be sent by God to mankind.[1]

In his analysis of the Qur’anic expression, Arthur Jeffery has surmised that it “may have been…already familiar to [Muhammad’s] contemporaries.” He points out that out that, in Arabic, *khātam* is a loanword from Aramaic, and that already in Christianity the message of Jesus is implicitly considered to be the final prophetic revelation.[2] Jeffery points out, however, that, only Mani explicitly claimed to be the last in the succession of messengers of God, adding that “in the Arabic sources it is recorded that his followers called him ‘the Seal of the Prophets.’ ”[3]

The fact that this actual wording is to be found only from the pen of Muslim doxographers and heresiologists should in itself call for our suspicion.[4] Yet, a pre-Islamic Manichaean attribution of the metaphor to Mani remains a possibility, and a review of the evidence is called for. In order to do so, I shall first seek to analyze the nature of the metaphorical use of “seal” in Manichaean parlance and then deal with the concepts of prophecy and apostleship in Manichaean writings. This analysis, it is hoped, will help to reconstruct the *Vorgeschichte* of the Qur’anic expression.

In the chapter of his *Athār al-Bāqiya* dealing with false prophets, al-Bīrūnī (d. ca. 1050 CE/AH 442) quotes verbatim the opening sentences of Mani's only Iranian work, the *Šābuhragān:*

> Wisdom and deeds have always from time to time been brought to mankind by the messengers of God (*rusul allah)*. So in one age they have been brought by the messenger (*rasūl*) called Buddha to India, in another by Zaradusht to Persia, in another by Jesus to the West. Thereupon this revelation has come down, this prophecy (*nubūwwa*) in this last age through me, Mani, the messenger of the God of Truth (*rasūl illāh al-haqq*) to Babylonia.[5]

After this quotation, the *Ustadh* adds—but this time without quoting verbatim—that, in his gospel, Mani "says that he is the Paraclete announced by the Messiah, and that he is the seal of the prophets (*khātam al-nabiyyīn*)."[6] Although al-Bīrūnī's intellectual integrity is not to be questioned, one cannot exclude the possibility that here he might be paraphrasing Mani's contention by using the Qur'anic expression rather than reporting it quite accurately. The following pages will seek to unveil what al-Bīrūnī could have read in Mani's gospel (probably in an Iranian translation) and in other Manichaean writings which led him, bona fide, to report that Mani called himself *khātam al-nabiyyīn*.

The other Arabic sources are even less compelling evidence.[7] Shahrastānī (d. 1053 CE/AH 547) only reports "and then must come the Seal of the Prophets," a sentence interpolated with the addition of "in the land of the Arabs."[8] Ibn al-Murtadā, analyzing a book written by the Manichaean leader Yazdānbakht, says that Mani appeared as "the seal of the prophets," that is, at the end of a series of prophets beginning with Adam, and including, together with Seth and Noah, Buddha, Zarādusht, and Jesus.[9] Yet, the fact that Yazdānbakht lived in the ninth century, in the time of al-Ma'mūn (according to Ibn al-Nadīm's explicit testimony in his important chapter on Manichaeism in the *Fihrist)*,[10] disqualifies his testimony as a reflection of a pre-Islamic Manichaean use of the actual phrase "seal of the prophets" with reference to Mani. It stands to reason that in the Islamic realm, the Manichaeans insisted that Mani, rather than Muhammad, had been *khātam al-nabiyyīn*. The same argument holds for Abu al-Ma'ali, who reports that it is in a book written in Persian towards the end of the eleventh century that Mani was called "seal of the prophets."[11]

II

The religious vocabulary of the Near East in the first Christian centuries retains a broad spectrum of senses for both the noun "seal" and the verb "to seal." As a matter of fact, both the straightforward and the figurative senses already appear in the Hebrew Bible. For the proper sense, one might see in particular Est. 8: 8–10 for the noun, or Jer. 32: 10 for the verb. For the figurative use, see, for instance, Cant. 8: 6 ("Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm"). For our present interest, see especially Hag. 2: 23, where God says to Zerubbabel, whom He calls His servant, that He will make him "like a *ḥotam*" (signet ring?), for He has chosen him. More precisely, even, in Dan. 9: 24, we read: "Seventy weeks of years are decreed concerning your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin (*ve-laḥtom ḥata'ot*), and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet (*ve-laḥtom ḥazon u-navi*), and to anoint a most holy place." It must be noted that the root *ḥtm* is used in its two senses in this last verse: to end (the first time) and to accomplish (the second time).[12] A brief investigation did not reveal any particular interest in the words *ve- laḥtom ḥazon u-navi* in either rabbinic or Christian exegesis.[13]

These same uses of the noun and the verb reappear in the New Testament. While a verse like Rev. 5: 1 obviously reflects the literal sense of a seal (on a letter), the figurative meaning appears too: in John 3: 33 it can only mean "to confirm," while in 2 Cor. 1: 22 Paul implies that, in sealing believers, God has made them His inviolable possession. Paul also reflects Jewish religious parlance when he says that Abraham "received the sign (*sēmeion*) of circumcision as a seal (*sphragis*) of the righteousness of the faith" (Rom. 4: 11). Indeed, circumcision is often called a *seal* in rabbinic literature: *Exodus Rabba*, for instance, speaks of "the seal of Abraham in your flesh," *ḥotam Abraham bi-besarekha*.[14] The same use is found in apostolic literature (for instance in *Barnabas* 9: 6), where *sphragis* obviously means "attestation" or "confirmation." From Jewish circumcision, however, the term came to refer primarily to baptism in early Christianity. The *Shepherd of Hermas* (*Simil*. IX. 16.3 17.4 and parallels) and the *2nd Letter of Clement* (7.6; 8.6), preserve the earliest use of this

label for baptism. In these writings, to receive the seal means to receive the name of God, to be granted life.

The *Shepherd of Hermas*, in particular, refers to those who have received the "seal of the Son of God," adding that the sealing is the water of baptism (*hē sphragis oun to hudōr estin*).[15] As Bousset, after Dölger, noted long ago, "the uttering of the name is probably only a weakened sacramental form for the more original, more robust custom of branding or etching upon the person being initiated the sign (name, symbol) of the appropriate God, to whom it was consecrated."[16] A similar metaphorical use of *seal* is to be found in various Gnostic texts, although an actual baptism with water might not be implied in all cases.[17]

Among the Mandaeans, *sealing* (*ḥatamta*), which protects against demons and evil powers, seems to be part of the baptismal ritual.[18] The cultic reference to *ḥatamta* in the Mandaean texts is particularly relevant for our purpose, since the Baptist Elchasaite community in which Mani grew up—and whose beliefs and religious practices he first attempted to reform, before openly and totally rebelling against them—was probably closely related to the Mandaean community and to other Gnostic Baptist groups of Jewish-Christian descent.[19]

III

Among other aspects of his complex religious self-identity, Mani considered himself to be the Paraclete of the *Endzeit*.[20] In his very peculiar, but nonetheless very intensely lived, *imitatio Jesu*, Mani considered his rejection of Elchasaite ritual to be parallel to the way in which Jesus had argued with the Pharisees about various points of the Law. In particular, Mani rejected the baptism of the Elchasaites and their frequent ablutions, which, he argued, had no soteriological value whatsoever.

"From Baptism to Gnosis," the apt title of Ludwig Koenen's systematic study,[21] emphasizes the basic shift accomplished by Mani and his followers in their approach to ritual. If the Manichaeans, however, rejected baptism, they did not reject all kinds of cult. It would seem, in particular, that they maintained a certain initiatory cult, which they called *seal*; the scant, but nonetheless conclusive evidence has been analyzed by Henri-Charles Puech.[22] To his conclusions, one should add that this Manichaean *seal* might well have evolved from the Elchasaite baptism.

Thus, we read in the Manichaean *Psalter*, found in a Coptic version which preserves some of the earliest strata of Manichaean literature:

> Receive the holy Seal (*sphragis*) from
> the Mind of the Church,
> and fulfill the commandments (*Ps*. 22: 11–12)

Despite this probable original and primary meaning, however, the Manichaean metaphor cannot remain, any more than any other metaphor, univalent. Indeed, we know of various meanings of the word in early Manichaean texts and traditions. In the *Psalter*, again, Jesus is addressed thus:

> Thou also art the seal (*sphragis*) of every wonder (60: 3–4)

Elsewhere in the same work we read:

> Receive the seal of the *stauros*—call—
> Receive not the seal outwardly (189: 13–15)

In the *Kephalaia*, similarly, the catechumen is sealed in his soul with the "Seal of Faith and the Seal of Truth" (or of gnosis; 225: 11–20). We read elsewhere in the same work that the *Spiritus Vivens* has fastened all his members (i.e. the Manichaeans) with a Chain of Peace, and sealed them with the Seal of Truth (143: 25–30). It is difficult to establish whether in these examples *seal* refers to a precise *Sitz im Leben*, or whether the metaphor does not imply any specific reference. Sometime before his Passion, Mani wrote to all his churches a "Letter of the Seal" (*frwrdg-ī-mwhr)*, which might be identical to his testament (*diathēkē*). The corrupt passage, however, mentioning this letter leaves no indication as to the meaning of *seal* in this case.[23]

Yet another precise conception, that of the "three seals" (*Ps*. 94: 12), appears time and again in the *Psalter*[24]:

> Let us seal (*mar^{e}ntōbe*) our mouth that we may find the Father and seal (*sphragizein*) our (?) hands that we may find the Son, and guard our purity that we may find the Holy Spirit.
>
> (*Ps*. 116: 16 ff.)

or else:

> The seal (*sphragis*) of the mouth for the sign of the Father, the peace of the hands for the sign of the Son, the purity of virginity for the sign of the Holy Spirit.
>
> (*Ps*. 115: 31–33)

The best description of what these *three seals* stood for in Manichaean theology is provided by Augustine. In his anti-Manichaean polemical works, the bishop of Hippo often refers to the three *signacula*, which stand for the main aspects of the ethics of his former coreligionists, whom he now calls "those false and lying saints" (*Conf*. V. 10).

The *signaculum oris*, the seal of the mouth, refers to their ritual diet (i.e., their vegetarianism and other food prohibitions) as well as to the prohibition on lies and evil words. The *signaculum manuum*, the seal of the hands, stands for the prohibition on murder, which does not only extend to men and animals, but also to the vegetal world, which Mani considered to be souled. The *signaculum sinus*, finally—the seal of the bosom—symbolizes the encratism of the Manichaean elect, their prohibition on marriage and sexual relations.[25] In these three cases, the *seal* would seem to be something which *shuts up* the part of the body to which it is applied, thus preventing sin through the mouth, the hands, or the bosom.

These three famous “moral” seals, however, are not the only consecrated symbols of the Manichaean faith. As the Iranist Abraham V. W. Jackson showed long ago, they should be seen in parallel with four other seals, known from the Turfan texts, and of a more doctrinal character.[26] These are the “four light seals,” as they are called in the X^{u}āstvānīft, a manual for the confession of sins extant only in an Uighur translation. Unfortunately, this text is not easily datable, although it stands to reason to postulate an early *Vorlage*.[27]

The relevant passage reads thus:

> In Äzrua, tängri, in the God of the Sun and Moon, in the powerful God and the prophets have we put our trust, we have relied on them (and) have become Auditors. Four Light Seals have we sealed in our hearts. Firstly Love, the seal of Äzrua, tängri, secondly Faith, the seal of the God of the Sun and Moon, thirdly the Fear (of God), the seal of the Fivefold God, (and) fourthly Wisdom, the seal of the prophets (*burxan*).[28]
> (VIII.13)

Those four light seals represent the four cardinal aspects of Manichaean theology, alluded to elsewhere in the doctrine of “the Fourfold God” (*ton tetraprosōpon patera tou megethous*), as he is called in the longer Greek formula of abjuration.[29]

The *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm preserves another, slightly different, version of these four articles of faith, which were part of Mani’s *Law*, speaking of “faith in the four greatnesses, namely (1) God, (2) His Light, (3) His Power, (4) His Wisdom.” The text adds: “His wisdom is the Holy Religion”[30] (composed of teachers, deacons, priests, the Elect, and the Hearers). It would thus seem that the “seal of the prophets” of the *X^{u}āstvānīft* must be connected with “the Holy Religion” of the *Fihrist*, i.e. the Manichaean Church.[31] This hypothesis is corroborated by another passage in the *X^{u}āstvānīft*:

> If we should somehow, unwittingly, have sinned against the holy Electi, who do meritorious deeds, and bring redemption, and if we, although we called (them) “true messenger of God” and “prophet”, (still) should not have believed (this): “The holy Elect is characterized by good deeds.”[32]

In other words the *electi* are explicitly called prophets (*burxan*), or “true messengers of God.” Thus, the metaphorical expression “seal of the prophets” is indeed found in a Manichaean text and might well be of pre-

Islamic origin. But the prophets referred to in this phrase are in no way Mani's predecessors, but rather his followers. Moreover, the *seal* metaphor does not imply either in this expression or in any of the other pre-Islamic mentions of the term studied here, a reference to "last," but, rather, relates to the idea of confirmation, or attestation.

IV

To my knowledge, the appellation *prophets* for the *electi*, although it is quite explicitly stated in the *X^{u}āstvānīft*, has not been hitherto duly noted by Manichaean scholarship. In order to understand its meaning more precisely, it might be useful to give a brief analysis of the Manichaean conception of prophecy. As noted in Section I, page 88, above, Mani called himself, in the *Šābuhragān*, "Apostle of the God of Truth to Babylonia." Mani, in whose complex religious personality not only the *imitatio Jesu*, but also the *imitatio Pauli* played a crucial role, also considered himself to be "Apostle of Jesus Christ"—although this figure was for him the Heavenly, or rather Cosmic *Yešu Ziwa*, and not the Jesus of Paul. In a fragment of his *Living Gospel*, preserved in the recently published Cologne Mani Codex (CMC), he says: "I, Mani, an apostle of Jesus Christ (*Iēsous Christou apostolos*) through the will of God, the Father of Truth"—adding, what Paul could in no way have added, "from whom I was also born."[33]

It is a striking and significant point that, again, does not seem to have been hitherto underlined, that Mani, who willingly attributes to himself the title of apostle, never refers to himself as a prophet. This fact does not only hold true for the Western Manichaean sources. In the Iranian texts, too, Mani is always called *frēstag* (translated "Apostel," "Gesandter," "Engel" by Henning and Sundermann) or else *frēstagrošn (= ho apostolos tou phōtos)*, while the vocable *paygambar* ("a prophet," "he who brings a message") seems never to be used in the Manichaean Iranian texts.[34] This should be explained, again, by Mani's *imitatio Pauli*. He consciously copies Paul's language, and this not only when he refers to himself as to an "apostle of Jesus Christ." The same is also true when his disciples are called "the seal of his apostleship" (*sphragis autou tēs apostolēs;* CMC 72: 4–7) in manifest imitation of 1 Cor. 9: 2, where Paul emphatically says to his own disciples, "It is you, indeed, who are the seal of my apostleship (*hē gar sphragis mou tēs apostolēs humeis este*)."[35]

Mani saw himself as the last in a succession of messengers sent by God, from the protoplast on, in order to bequeath to mankind the visions granted to them in ecstatic rapture. Thus Adam, Seth, Enosh, Shem, Enoch, up to Paul, "each one of the forefathers showed his own revelation to his elect."[36]

In their turn, these elect ones are to preach, in each generation, these revelations to outsiders. The forefathers, although they are referred to once, in CMC 62: 9–14, as "the most blessed apostles, saviors, evangelists, and prophets of the truth," are generally simply called *apostles*. Thus: "concerning the way in which this apostleship in this generation was sent" (CMC 45: 4 ff.). Or again, "All apostles cried, they announced…this fight in each one of their books, from Adam…until today."[37]

In parallel to this chain of biblical messengers beginning with Adam, we are told of two, or three, main revealer figures appearing in history before Mani. In the passage of the *Šābuhragān* quoted in Section I, page 88, above, Mani refers to Buddha, Zarathustra, and Jesus, while in the *Homilies* only Zarathustra and Jesus are mentioned before Mani, "the Third Apostle" (11: 23–4; 25–7) or "the Apostle of Light" (16: 28; cf. 28: 21 and 28). There is no doubt that Mani considered himself the last such revealer to be sent to humankind before the *Endzeit*, since he thought that while previous apostles had only revealed aspects of the divine truth, his own apostleship was meant to reveal gnosis in its totality—and therefore was final.[38]

As is well known, the theory which lies at the basis of Mani's conception of apostleship is that first developed by the Ebionites, who considered Jesus to be the prophet foretold by Moses in Deut. 18: 5.[39] They called Jesus "the True" (*ho alēthēs*), or "the Unique" Prophet (*ho heis prophētēs*), and even "the only prophet of truth" (*ho tēs alētheias monos prophētēs*).[40] In this conception, however, Jesus was considered to be only the last incarnation of this true prophet; one who had run through the ages incarnating himself anew in each generation, from Adam onwards.

In this context, the clear preference shown by Mani for *apostle* over *prophet* stands to reason if we remember that Paul, whom Mani held in such high esteem, was depicted in the darkest colors in Ebionite theology (in the Pseudo-Clementine writings, Simon Magus is only Paul's mouthpiece). While the Ebionites never refer to Jesus as *apostolos*, it would seem that Elchasaite theology was on this point noticeably different. In this regard, one may refer to Heb. 3: 1, where Jesus is called *apostolos*, a title shared by the heavenly messenger *Manda d^{e}hayyē* in Mandaic texts (*'izganda)*.[41]

Despite these texts, the semantic fields of *apostolos* and *prophētēs* are far from being quite distinct in early Christian literature. In the New Testament, apostles and prophets are often mentioned in the same breath.

Thus, in Luke 11: 49, where the Wisdom of God says, “I shall send them prophets and apostles,” or, similarly, in Rev. 18: 20 and Eph. 3: 5. The synonymity between apostle and prophet is most clear in the *Didachē*, for which an apostle staying three days or more in a community is considered to be a false prophet.[42] Indeed, in the early church, where apostles and prophets were known as teachers (*didaskaloi*) as well, their roles do not seem always to have been clearly distinct. In the earliest Antiochene community, for instance, there were *prophētai kai didaskaloi*, “prophets and teachers” (Acts 13: 1); the coupled terms call to mind the words in which Mani describes the reaction of certain Baptists to his early advocations: “some of them took me for a prophet and teacher.”[43]

Other indications, however, would suggest that in some milieus a distinction was made between these various titles. Paul, in particular, establishes a clear hierarchy between apostles, prophets, and teachers—who constitute, together, the mystical body of Christ: “And you are the body of Christ and members each for his part, and those whom God has established in the church are first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers” (1 Cor. 12: 27–8; cf. Eph. 4: 11). The preponderance of the apostles in the hierarchy is directly relevant to Mani’s self-understanding as an apostle—in opposition to those Baptists who saw in him, at first, only a prophet or a teacher.

In the *Xuāstvānīft*, as noted, the *electi*, the inner core of the Manichaean Church, are designated as *prophets*. A similarly central role was played by *prophets* in some early Christian trends, the best-known case being that of Montanism, an enthusiastic and chiliastic movement which flourished in Asia Minor in the later half of the second century. The bishops soon perceived the success of this schismatic movement as a direct challenge to their growing ecclesial power, and charisma was readily checked and neutralized. Yet, a curious fragmentary papyrus found at Oxyrhynchus, and dated from the third or fourth century, provides an interesting parallel to the Manichaean designation of the *electi* as *prophets*. Speaking about those who, being filled with the Holy Spirit, reveal in their words the Spirit of Divinity, the fragment adds: “for the spirit of prophecy is the essence of the prophetic order (*tēs prophētikēs taxeōs*), which is the body of the flesh of Jesus Christ, which was mingled with human nature through Mary.”[44]

As the last words clearly show, the author of the fragment was far from docetic in attitude. And yet, his mention of a “college of prophets” who

represent the body of Christ, i.e. the core of the Church, does not only allude to the words of Paul quoted above (1 Cor. 12: 7–28). They also describe a conception similar to that of the Manichaean Church. This similarity is all the more striking since we now know that this church—which included only the *electi*, i.e. the "prophets"—was called "the (mystical) Body of Mani," as revealed by the very title of the CMC (which probably represents only the first part of a lost History of the Manichaean Church): "On the Birth of His Body" (*peri tēs gennēs tou sōmatos autou*).[45]

If the evidence analyzed here is to be trusted, a number of conclusions can be drawn. First, Mani does not seem to have considered himself only, or mainly, a prophet. In his own eyes, he was, more than a prophet, an apostle. Secondly, the term *prophet*, although polyvalent, seems to have been used in the early Manichaean Church as an appellation for the *electi*. Thirdly, the metaphor of "seal," although polyvalent in Manichaean literature, nowhere implies the idea of *last, end*, but rather of *confirmation, attestation*, or else *sign*. Fourthly, in the only Manichaean text in which it occurs, the metaphor "seal of the prophets" can only refer to one of the four cardinal theological virtues. Finally, the doxographic evidence, all from Muslim authors, in which Mani is said to have called himself "seal of the prophets" cannot be trusted.

The persistence of prophecy, that is, of charismatic pneumatic trends within the early stages of development of a religious movement—and at its very core, not only on its fringes—is not a surprising phenomenon. Since Max Weber, sociologists of religion have known that such trends are usually uprooted as "heretical" only later, when ecclesial power is stabilized.[46] What seems to have been true of Christianity and of Islam might also hold for later Manichaeism—but here the sources are so scarce that they prevent even speculation.

[1] For a thorough analysis of the Islamic understanding of the expression, see Yohanan Friedmann, "Finality of Prophethood in Sunni Islam," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 7 (1986), 177–215. See further Uri Rubin, "The Seal of the Prophets and the Finality of Prophecy: On the Interpretation of the Qur'ānic *Sūrat al-Ahzāb* (33)," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 164 (2014), 65–96. A version of the present chapter was originally published in the same (1986) issue of *JSAI* as Friedmann's article. Cf. Carsten Colpe, *Das Siegel der Propheten: historische Beziehungen zwischen Judentum, Judenchristentum, Heidentum und frühem Islam*, Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Theologie und Zeitgeschichte (Berlin: Institut Kirche und Judentum, 1990), ch. 9, pp. 227–43 ("Mohammed und Mani als Prophetensiegel"). Colpe's argument was originally

published in the same year as my original article. Strikingly, we both reach the same conclusions, through a different argumentation.

[2] Arthur Jeffery, “The Qur’an as Scripture,” *The Muslim World* 40 (1950), 41–55. See also Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur’ān* (Boroda: Oriental Institute, 1938), pp. 120–1.

[3] “The Qur’an as Scripture,” 18. Cf. my “Aspects de l’eschatologie manichéenne,” *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* 198 (1998), 163–81 (p. 169, n. 28).

[4] See the careful hesitation of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 281, n. 49 in accepting the authenticity of the wording.

[5] Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Bīrūnī, *Chronologie orientalischer Völker von Alberuni*, ed. Eduard Sachau (Leipzig: DMG, 1923), p. 207. I quote Sachau’s translation: *The Chronology of Ancient Nations*, trans. Eduard Sachau (London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1879), p. 190.

[6] *Chronology of Ancient Nations*, p. 190.

[7] These sources were first collected (and analyzed) by Konrad Kessler, *Mani: Forschungen über die manichäische Religion* (Berlin, 1889), Bd 1, and more recently by Hasan Taqîzadeh, *Mânî ve dîn-i û* (Tehran, 1956). To these Islamic theologians reporting on Manichaeism, one should add at least ‘Abd al-Jabbar (11th cent.), who mentions Adam, Seth, Noah, Zarathustra, Buddha, and Jesus as revealers of gnosis (‘*ilm*) before Mani, “the seal of prophets”; *Al-mughni fi abwab al-tawhid wa’l-‘adl*, V. ed. M. Khudeiri (Cairo, 1965), 15; cf. G. Vajda, “Le témoignage d’al-Maturidi sur la doctrine des manichéens, des daysanites et des marcionites,” *Arabica* 13 (1966), 1–38. For other texts, see Guy Monnot, “Quelques textes de ‘Abd-Al-Jabbâr sur le manichéisme,” *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* 183 (1973), 3–9, esp. 4 (Passage A): “II (=Mani) prétendit être l’envoyé (*rasūl*) de la lumière.”

[8] Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milal wa’l-niḥal: Book of Religious and Philosophical Sects*, ed. William Cureton, 2 vols (London: Society for the Publication of Oriental Texts, 1864), vol. 1, p. 192: *khatam al-nabiyyin ila ard al- ‘arab*. See *Asch-Schahrastâni’s Religionspartheien und Philosophenschulen*, trans. Theodor Haarbrücker, 2 vols (Halle: C. A. Schwetschke, 1850), vol. 1, p. 290. Cf. Henri-Charles Puech, *Le Manichéisme: Son fondateur—sa doctrine* (Paris: Musée Guimet, 1949), p. 146, n. 248. On the traditions about Mani’s prophecy and his precursors, see also Otakar Klima, *Manis Zeit und Leben*, Monografie Orientálního Ústavu ČSAV 18 (Prague: Verlag der Tschechoslowakischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1962), p. 303, n.46. Cf. Vajda, “Le témoignage d’al-Maturidi ,” p. 121, n. 4: p.122 and n. 2.

[9] Cited by Kessler, *Mani: Forschungen über die manichäische Religion*, vol. 1, p. 348, trans. pp. 354–5.

[10] *Mani, seine Lehre und seine Schriften*, ed. & trans. Gustav Flügel (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1862), p. 79, trans. p. 106. See also Bayard Dodge’s translation, *The Fihrist of Al-Nadīm: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, ed. Bayard Dodge (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), vol. 2, p. 805.

[11] Cited by Kessler, *Mani: Forschungen über die manichäische Religion*, vol. 1, p. 349, trans. pp. 354–5. On the main traditions about the succession of envoys, see Michel Tardieu, *Le Manichéisme*, Que sais-je? (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1981), pp. 19–27, esp. pp. 22–3.

[12] On the various meanings of “seal” in the biblical writings, in Hellenistic and rabbinic Judaism, and in early Christian writings, see Gottfried Fitzer, “Σφραγίς [sphragis],” in Gerhard Kittel, ed.,

Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, 939–53. See also W. Bauer's *Lexicon. s.v. sphragis*. See further Franz Joseph Dölger, *Sphragis: eine altchristliche Taufbezeichnung in ihren Beziehungen zur profanen und religiösen Kultur des Altertums* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1911).

[13] The possibility, however, remains that Christian writings were instrumental in carrying to seventh-century Arabia the idea of a "seal of the prophets."

[14] Actually, the expression is a very early one, since it appears already in the *Testament of Levi* (2nd cent. BC). See David Flusser and Shmuel Safrai, "Who Sanctified the Well-Beloved in (lit. from) the Womb," in *Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1978), pp. 329–36 (p. 333 and 16).

[15] It must be noted that the usual Syriac equivalent of *sphragis* in reference to the initiation rite is *rūšma* rather than *h.ūtma* (see Robert Payne Smith, *Thesaurus syriacus* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1981), vol. 1, pp. 1410–11; vol. 2, pp. 3985–8. In early Syriac Christianity, the *rūšma* consisted (before baptism with water) in anointing with oil, a rite which Old Testament prophets underwent; see for instance 1 Sam. 10: 1–6 or 1 Kings 19: 15–16.

[16] Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), p. 296.

[17] References given by Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, p. 296 n.186 and p. 297. See esp. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer*. I.25.6 (Carpocratians); *Exc. ex Theodoto* 80 and 86.

[18] See Kurt Rudolph, *Die Mandäer II: Der Kult* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961), pp. 155–74 and 198–201. Rudolph concludes thus his analysis of the texts: "Der Begriff Siegelung [*hatamtā*] ist ein umfassender, der sowohl die Ölzeichnung als auch eine eigene Handlung bezeichnen kann…" (168).

[19] See Albert Henrichs and Ludwig Koenen, "Ein griechischer Mani-Kodex," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 5 (1970), 132–40 and Albert Henrichs, "Mani and the Babylonian Baptists: A Historical Confrontation," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 77 (1973), 23–59.

[20] The evidence is presented and analyzed by Ludwig Koenen, "Augustine and Manichaeism in Light of the Cologne Mani Codex," *Illinois Classical Studies* 3 (1973), 154–95.

[21] In *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, New Haven, Connecticut, March 28–31, 1978*, ed. Bentley Layton, Studies in the History of Religions: Supplements to Numen, 41 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980).

[22] Puech has studied Manichaean liturgy and ritual practices during twenty years of lectures at the Collège de France (1952–72). The results of his researches, first published by the Collège are now conveniently reprinted in Henri-Charles Puech, *Sur le manichéisme et autres essais* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979). On the rite of sealing, see esp. pp. 347–55. We have evidence of such a rite, performed by Gabriabios, one of Mani's disciples in the Kingdom of Revan. See Werner Sundermann, *Mitteliranische manichäische Texte kirchengeschichtlichen Inhalts* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1981), p. 47 (text 3.4).

[23] This letter is mentioned in M 454 B, Andreas–Henning, "Mitteliranische Manichaica aus Chinesisch-Turkestan, III" *SPAW* (1934), 891, reprinted in Henning, *Henning, Selected Papers*, ed. by Mary Boyce (Leiden: Brill, 1977), vol. 1, p. 318. Cf. W. B. Henning, "Bet- und Beichtbuch," in Henning, *Selected Papers*, vol. 1, p. 432. See also Sundermann, *Mitteliranische manichäische Texte*, p. 135 (frgt 2274). The testament is referred to in Hom. 95.3; cf. Hom. 50 and 94–96, *passim*. See also Puech, *Sur le manichéisme et autres essais*, p. 303.

[24] These “three seals” are also referred to by Ibn al-Nadīm. See Ibn al-Nadīm, p. 64 (trans. 95).

[25] The three seals are best discussed by Prosper Alfaric, *L’Évolution intellectuelle de saint Augustin* (Paris: E. Nourry, 1918), pp. 126–43. Augustine’s testimony had already been remarkably analyzed by Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Das manichäische Religionssystem nach den Quellen neu untersucht und entwikelt* (Tübingen: Ofsander, 1831), pp. 248–60 (reprinted Göttingen, 1928).

[26] See Jackson’s study of “the Manichaean ‘seals’,” in his *Researches in Manichaeism, with Special Reference to the Turfan Fragments* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), pp. 331–7.

[27] The most thorough study of the text is that of Jes Peter Asmussen, *X^{u}āstvānift: Studies in Manichaeism*, Acta Theologica Danica, 7 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1965). Asmussen (p. 206) points out that the Parthian loanwords might reflect an early *Vorlage*, since in the latter half of the sixth century Parthian was replaced by Sogdian as the “sacred language” of the Manichaeans in the East. Actually, a noteworthy parallel to the idea of the four seals betrays the probable Sasanian *Sitz im Leben* of the Manichaean conception. According to Mas’ūdī, King Anushirvan used four seals: “Celui de l’impôt…avait pour empreinte “la Justice”; le sceau des domaines…“l’Agriculture”; le sceau des contributions (?)…“la Temporisation”; le sceau des postes…“la Fidélité” (var. “l’Espoir”). I quote Pellat’s translation, Mas‘ūdī, *Les Prairies d’or*, trans. Charles Pellat, 2 vols (Paris: Société asiatique, 1962), vol. 1, p. 234, § 626. It is striking that like the four Manichaean seals, those of the Sasanian king (or rather three of them) bear names of virtues. I wish to thank Shaul Shaked for calling my attention to this passage.

[28] Asmussen, *Xuāstvānift*, 196 (text p. 175, lines 173–80); commentary pp. 220–1) translates *burxan* as “divine revealers of religion.” See also H. J. Klimkeit, “Der Buddha Henoch: Qumran and Turfan,” *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 32 (1980), 367–75. On p. 367, Klimkeit discusses the meaning of *burxan* (which came to be identified in Buddhist and Manichaean texts with “Buddha”), noting that the term seems to stand for the Iranian *‘hyng* (“Vorausgegangener, Prophet”) rather than *frvstg*. The last word, in its turn, appears to stand for “Apostle,” rather than “Prophet” in the Manichaean texts.

[29] See Jackson, *Researches*, p. 332. Cf. E. Peterson, “Jesus bei den Manichäern,” *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 53 (1928), 241–50, esp. 243; Peterson postulated, as a possible origin for this concept of the “four-faced” Father, “eine ältere Gnosis des Thronwagens Gottes.…” The same *tetras* is found also in Iranian texts; see for instance Andreas–Henning, “Mitteliranische Manichaica aus Chinesisch-Turkestan, II” (*SPAW* 1932) 329 and 324, n. 7: reprinted in Henning, *Selected Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 226 and 221.

[30] *wa-hikmatuhu al-din al-muqaddas*, 64 Flűgel (trans. p. 95: vol. 2, p. 789 Dodge); see also Flügel’s notes 220 and 223, pp. 292–3.

[31] See Asmussen, *Xuāstvānīft*, p. 221: “Instead of ‘the Prophets’ the passage in *Fihrist* has ‘the holy (hallowed) religion’…which in itself comes to the same thing, as ‘the Prophets’ represent the concrete, visible Church, ‘the holy religion’ the Church as the universal invisible quantity.”

[32] IV.B, 195 Asmussen (text p. 172).

[33] CMC 66: 4–7.

[34] For references, see the indices to *Mir. Man*. II and III in Henning, *Selected Papers*, vol. 1, as well as to Sundermann.

[35] This is noted by the editors of the Codex; see *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 19 (1975), p. 72, n.138; cf. *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 5 (1970), 109, n. 25, where total credibility is accorded to al-Bīrūnī's wording: "Während im Kölner Codex die Prophetenschüler als die Siegel der Sendung ihrer Lehrer erscheinen, hat sich Mani selbst als das abschliessende Siegel aller Propheten angesehen. Diese Bezeichnung übenahm Muhammad im Koran."

[36] "*Hōs heis hekastos tōn progenesterōn paterōn tēn idian apokalupsin edeixen tēi heautou eklogēi*" (CMC 47: 4–7).

[37] *Homilien* 14: 29–31. The "fight" is the great apocalytic war, on which see my "Aspects de l'eschatologie manichéenne."

[38] Hoc enim quasi proprium atque praecipuum auctoris sui laudibus tribuunt, quod dicunt illa quae ab antiquis figurate in libris divina mysteria posita sunt, huic qui ultimus venturus erat, solvenda et demonstranda esse servata: et propterea post istum iam neminem doctorem divinitus esse venturum, Augustine, *C. Ep. Fundamenti* XXIII. 25 in *Six traités anti-manichéens*, trans. Régis Jolivet and Maurice Jourjon (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1961), p. 448.

[39] See Henrichs, "Mani and the Babylonian Baptists", pp. 54–5.

[40] Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* 11.33.1; for numerous parallels in the Pseudo-Clementinian literature, see G. Friedrich's article "*prophētēs, ktl.*…" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964–76), vol. 6, pp. 759–858.

[41] *Book of John* 66, cited by Rengstorf, "*apostolos, ktl.*…" in *TDNT*, vol. 1, p. 443.

[42] *pseudoprophētēs*; *Did*. 11: 3.4.

[43] CMC 86, 1.

[44] *The Oxyrhynchus papyri*, ed. by Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1898), vol. 8 (11. 4–15 recto). The editors' title is "Fragment of a Christian Homily or Treatise on the Spirit of Prophecy." Friedrich, who refers to the fragment (*prophētēs* […], 859), mentions an article by Harnack, "Über 2 von Grenfell u. Hunt endeckte u. publicierte altchr. Fragmente," *SAB* (1898), 516–20; *non vidi*. But see Irenaeus, *Adv. haer*. IV.33.10 (SC 100:824–5 Rousseau), where the Old Testament prophets are called members of Christ.

[45] See Koenen, "Augustine and Manichaeism," pp. 164–6.

[46] For an analysis of such processes of evolution, see John G. Gager, *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975), p. 68 ff.

Part III

Religious Communities and God’s Law

Religious Dynamics between Jews and Christians

In the first two parts of this book I have sought to delineate some of the major transformations of religion in late antiquity and to follow throughout our period the evolution of the idea of prophecy—a crucial concept inherited from Israelite religion. We shall now turn to the way in which religious communities became the central element of religious life and thought during our period. More precisely, we shall focus on some of the political dimensions—in the broader sense—of religion; namely, the ways in which Jews and Christians interacted (Chapter 6 “Religious Dynamics between Jews and Christians”) and the idea of theocracy, the rule of God in the polity (Chapter 7 “God’s Rule in Late Antiquity”).

I

Augustine called the Jews "our book keepers," *librarii nostri*.[1] Beyond the reference to God's revelation of the Scriptures to Israel, the expression emphasizes the fact that the deep, essential, and intimate relationship between Christians and Jews remained a concrete and permanent one at the turn of the fifth century. In the mid-sixth century, John of Ephesus, the leading Monophysite church historian and hagiographer, reports that a monk visiting a mountainous village east of the Euphrates asks the people he meets: "Are you Christians or Jews?"[2] As this vignette shows, it was sometimes difficult to distinguish a Christian from a Jew in the late ancient Near East. Both could speak the same language and look the same. This was probably also the case all around the Mediterranean: there was usually no clear-cut or visible differentiation between the two estranged communities. Both Augustine of Hippo and John of Ephesus testify to the state of affairs after the watershed of the fourth century, which had seen a radical reversal of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity.

Indeed, the conversion of Constantine was only the prelude to other deep transformations of the relationship between Christians and Jews, up to the Muslim conquests. Before Constantine, while Judaism was a *religio licita*, the Christians had remained beyond the fringes of legality. Moreover, the last two generations of scholarship have radically shaken the old perception (nurtured by theological prejudice) according to which the Jews had begun a drastic process of social and intellectual seclusion after 70 CE, accelerated by the bloody revolts in Alexandria and then in Palestine during the early second century. Soon after Constantine, who reportedly described the Jews as "slayers of the prophets and killers of the Lord,"[3] things began to change. Throughout the fourth century, Christianity moved fast from being prohibited to being tolerated, then to preferred status, and eventually to state religion. At the same time, the Jews saw a series of grave infringements upon their rights and social status, limiting in drastic ways their integration into society. Judaism was now tolerated, at best, only because the Jews cherished the Old Testament (which, Christians said, they misread in some important ways). After 380, when Theodosius I published in Thessalonica his edict *Cunctos populos*, making Christianity into the state religion, the

Jews became for all practical purposes second-class citizens, although they were not demoted from the status of *cives romani*. In a sense, they had become "*dhimmis" avant la lettre* (in 388, Theodosius prohibited marriage between Christians and Jews).[4] Such a modicum of toleration, it should be noted, was offered neither to pagans nor to heretics. This process of segregation, to be sure, was not a straight line. John Chrysostom's eight "*Sermons against the Jews*" of 386 were actually written not against the Jews, but as a direct rebuke of Judaizing tendencies amidst Antiochene Christians.[5] To follow Harnack, the Jew appears here as a rhetorical device: it is the Jew as the Christian feared him. Indeed, the violence of these sermons shows the extent to which Judaism had retained its power of attraction at the end of the fourth century. It also echoes the fear this attraction could generate, twenty years after the failure of Julian's attempt at rebuilding the Jerusalem Temple. Chrysostom's invectives are usually perceived as reflecting the last stage, as it were, of Judaism's attractive powers. One should perhaps also question this view, and wonder whether the clear legal and social worsening of the Jews' status necessarily meant the disappearance of the cultural interaction between Jews and Christians. We shall seek here to review some of the ways in which Jews and Christians interacted in the Christianized Roman Empire, as well as in the Sasanian Empire, where both were religious minorities.

While the two communities were, of course, incommensurable in their numbers and legal status in the early Byzantine Empire, their common biblical heritage entailed what we may call a religious *koinē* of sorts and continuous exchanges that went well beyond religious polemics.[6] The period under study saw the formation and crystallization of both Byzantine and rabbinic theology, and would prove crucial for the future of both religions. Yet studying primarily theology overlooks a number of historical complexities. Many of the cultural dialectics of these contacts are not specifically religious. Most Jews, like most Christians, were no theologians, and the study of religious dynamics must deal with the various ways in which they interacted, for instance, in language, folklore, or magic.

The Islamic conquest must also be taken seriously. It would again change, in drastic ways, the terms of the relationship throughout the Near East and North Africa. From then on, both Jews and Christians shared, more or less, the same status as *ahl al-kitāb*, a religious community tolerated because it had a scripture. More precisely, one can perhaps claim

that the emergence of Islam represents one result of the cultural dynamics between Christianity and Judaism. Muhammad knew elements of both Judaism and Christianity and rejected parts of these two religions as well accepting elements of both. In a sense, the very concept of *ahl al-kitāb* represents a broadening to Christians (and to Zoroastrians) of the Christian theological attitude toward Jews since the fourth century, while the imperial legislative limitations would be echoed in the Islamic concept of the *ahl al-dhimma*.[7] Even the Byzantine Empire's definition of itself developed religiously and politically in relation to the emerging competitor to Christianity, Islam. Yet, the immediate counterpoint to Byzantine identity, at least from a religious viewpoint, remained the Jews, both in their present gloomy obstinacy and in the past glory of their sacral kingship.[8]

A few caveats are in order. First, the two communities (or, rather, webs of communities) are far from being comparable by almost any criterion. While we remain ignorant about Jewish demography in late antiquity, Jews were much less numerous in the fourth century than they had been under the early Roman Empire (although they probably never represented a significant part of the overall population, as estimated by some).[9]

The relations between Christians and Jews in antiquity are usually compared to those between Christians and pagans. The natural tendency is to focus upon the Roman Empire, forgetting that some important Christian communities (both Miaphysites and Nestorians) were present in the Sasanian Empire, and had some cultural visibility, as doctors (Nestorians in Gundishapur, for instance) and translators of Greek literature. They must have developed at least some contact with the Jewish communities there, sharing Aramaic as their common language. The chief significance involves the leading role of late ancient Jewish Babylonian communities in defining the religious identity of, and a cultural agenda for, the Jews in Palestine, as well as in the various diasporas, through their interpretation of normative rabbinic Judaism, which came to dominate Jewish life after the Islamic conquests.

Jews and Christians were involved in a direct competition, leading at times to violent clashes, with both communities claiming the same inheritance. This fact draws attention to their polemics, to the conflicting side of their relationship, and obscures the important and many common aspects of their lives. By definition, polemical literature insists on what

divides, ignoring the many points of agreement between two groups.[10] To a great extent, however, the life of Jews and Christians, as well as of members of other religious communities, followed very similar patterns. What we may call the "common life," *koinos bios*, of Jews and Christians in late antiquity is highly significant for a richer understanding of the cultural dynamics between them. Folklore provides an example. To a great extent, for instance, midrashic literature may be read as "tales of the neighborhood," reflecting the common daily life and attitudes of Jews and Christians (and not only of them) in late antique Galilee.[11]

II

In our period, significant Jewish communities existed throughout the Christian Roman Empire, whether in the East or West. Christian attitudes toward Jews, both public and private, apparently varied in different areas. If there was cultural exclusivity in Byzantium, for instance, the fact that there were fewer Jews in the West does not seem to have promoted more lenient attitudes towards them. On the contrary, anti-Jewish legislation evidently was harsher in the West. But the most important Jewish communities of later antiquity were located outside the Roman Empire. We find significant Jewish communities in Arabia, for instance, where the Jewish king Dhu Nuwwas (517–25) persecuted the Negus Christians in Najran. Jews also lived elsewhere in the Near East, particularly in the Sasanian Empire.

Palestine represents a special case, as both the historical country of the Jews, who call it "the land of Israel," and that of the Christians who would learn to name it "the holy land" (a term which appears for the first time in sixth-century hagiographical literature from Palestine). We know little of Jewish communities in Alexandria—and in the rest of Egypt—after the mid-second century. In North Africa, where the existence of notable communities is attested from the times of Tertullian to those of Augustine, we remain in the dark as to their size and their activities, including their cultural life—though there is nothing to suggest much consequence to either. Some similarities between Tertullian's patterns of thought and Jewish law are not enough to permit extrapolations. Jews who thought they had been wronged in a real-estate deal could ask for justice and protection from Bishop Augustine, but he does not seem to know very much about (or to retain an interest in) Jewish practices.

There were Jewish communities in Visigothic Spain, but here too, the scant evidence is enough to suggest that they were dwindling at the time of the Islamic invasion. Isidore of Seville, in the seventh century, does not seem to have met Jews. Everywhere in the Roman Empire, Jews formed minority communities, while Christians asserted themselves as belonging to the majority. This imbalance was shattered only in the Sasanian Empire, where both Jews and Christians represented minorities, rather similar in

various ways. This important situation is interesting in the relations between Christians and Jews in the Euphrates valley during late antiquity.

After the fourth century, the evidence about Jews in general, and about Jewish–Christian relationships in particular, is twofold: archaeological and literary. The former can sometimes be used to sharpen the insights provided by the latter.[12] While the archaeological data from Byzantine Palestine is remarkable, the remains of Jewish synagogues or funerary monuments in the Diaspora are meager. As for Jewish documents, we have nothing except the literature produced in both Palestine and Mesopotamia, to which should be added the various magical inscriptions on bowls or papyri. On the other hand, the evidence provided by Christian texts is mainly of a theological nature and includes biblical exegesis, spiritual exhortation, homiletics, and polemical, as well as theological, tractates. To these sources should be added imperial legislation, in particular as it appears in the codices of Theodosius and of Justinian, which tells us a lot about daily practices and conceptions.

III

When we speak of communities, we tend to assume that this was the natural mould of religious expression for both Jews and Christians.[13] But one should avoid isolating these two special groups from the broader context. In the ancient world, religion was above all a matter of state, of public life. The heart of religious cult was public, from Egypt and Babylonia to Rome. The Jerusalem Temple reflected the Israelite version of ancient civic religion (as best expressed in Varro's conception of *religio civilis*). After its destruction, Judaism underwent a deep transformation and religion became to a great extent internalized, while religious life was centered upon the synagogue cult and learning the Torah in the community. The early Christians, of course, lived their religious life within communities, as any form of public expression of their faith was prohibited. In adopting Christianity, Constantine thought that the new faith could advantageously replace the old cult of the gods and provide a new civic religion for the Empire. This was a gross miscalculation, of course, as Machiavelli saw so well: Christianity was not really fitted as a civil religion, as it preached another, heavenly, kingdom.

Like Judaism, Christianity was essentially a religion of communities, based upon books.[14] Christian scriptures were translated into various languages, in and outside the Empire. Such a web of communities went against the grain of a civic religion that could provide a unification principle for the Empire. Actually, between the fourth and the seventh century, there was a significant, and at points dramatic, decline in economic activity and long-distance communications throughout the Mediterranean. Indices such as naval commerce are directly relevant here. The growth of religious communities in late antiquity, fostered by Judaism and Christianity, is one of the significant but still rather understudied marks of this global decline.

Another characteristic of the Christianized Empire was the new central importance of religion (as distinguished from other aspects of culture) in the perception of identity. Since Hellenistic times, identity had been usually phrased in terms of culture (including religion). Traditional ethnic frameworks of identity had been replaced, to a great extent, by broader

horizons. Identity was not anymore necessarily given with birth, but could be chosen. One only needed to speak Greek (or Latin) in order to identify oneself as a member of a society with ecumenical dimensions. Just as one could adopt a culture, one could also convert to a new religion. Conversion had been a recognized possibility since Alexander.[15] With the victory of Christianity, however, the nature of conversion changed in very significant ways. Unlike other religions in the Roman Empire (including the mystery cults), with the exception of Judaism, Christianity insisted upon truth as a central aspect of religion. Choice now received a consequence unknown elsewhere.

The new insistence on religious identity permitted the development of identity based essentially on community. This new communitarian identity, which too often remains unrecognized, is of crucial importance for the correct understanding of the religious dynamics between Christians and Jews in late antiquity. Indeed, despite the deep differences between minority (the Jews) and majority (the Christians), the relationships between the two groups were based upon their common self-understanding as religious communities. While the religious elites worked on building and maintaining the boundaries of the communities, autonomous and self-enclosed, these boundaries were constantly eroded by daily intercourse.

The radically new status of Christianity in the fourth century was not quite unparalleled in Judaism, in the sense that only then did the rabbinic movement succeed in imposing its view of things on the great majority of Jews. Until then, it seems that the Jewish public was much more amorphous in its beliefs and attitudes than would eventually become the case, often harboring syncretistic beliefs that did not square well with the theology of the rabbis.[16]

Some scholars, in particular Jacob Neusner, following Rosemary Ruether, and himself followed by Daniel Boyarin, have noticed that only in the fourth century did Jews and Christians come into possession, for the first time, of clear-cut identities; hence, for Neusner, the historical meeting between Judaism and Christianity occurred in the fourth century.[17] To Neusner’s analysis, one should add the contemporary emergence of both Jewish and Christian intellectual culture, the former bilingual in nature (Hebrew and Aramaic, both in Palestine and in Mesopotamia), the latter expressed in a plurality of languages (at least Greek, Latin, Syriac, Coptic,

Armenian, Persian). It is the combination of these two factors that explains the power of the new dynamics between Jews and Christians.

IV

Fourth-century Judaism and Christianity were religions that had undergone some deep transformations. They were in their essence sacrificial religions, but of a special kind, since no sacrifice actually took place. Structurally, these religions were, of course, vastly different, because of the absence of priests and monks among the Jews. As a consequence of this state of affairs, the synagogue, or *beit ha-midrash* (literally, "house of hermeneutics"), became a polyvalent centre of cultic and cultural activity unequalled in Christianity, where cult and culture usually remained clearly distinguished —the first in church, the second in the monastery.

Both Judaism and Christianity were originally eschatological religions, but in both, as we saw in Chapter 5, the eschatological drive had been more or less neutralized, and was now limited to episodes of flaring messianism or to marginalized groups. Both were establishing themselves as "religions of the book," in a cultural environment that remained largely based upon orality. Among the Jews, in particular, as among other cultures of the Near East, such as the Iranians, the idea of the book itself remained to a great extent oral. Among the rabbis, books were certainly redacted, but not committed to writing.[18] Last but not least, both Judaism and Christianity had succeeded, in the preceding centuries, in establishing orthodoxies. In various ways, dissenting tendencies had been declared heretical and marginalized. Among the Christians, these groups were now in the process of simply being outlawed, like pagans. That left the Jews as the only officially authorized dissenting religious group in the Christian empire. From one strong perspective, Christianity could be seen as a Jewish heresy —but it had now turned the tables on *vetus Israel*, and had transformed Judaism, as it were, into a Christian heresy.

V

Both the legal and social situation of the Jews seriously deteriorated from the end of the fourth century. As intercommunal violence between Jews and Christians became more and more common, the authorities hesitated between legal protection of the Jews and passive or even active support of the Christian mobs, which often moved with the blessing of the bishops. In a famous (or rather, infamous) letter to Theodosius I, written in 388, Bishop Ambrose of Milan opposes the emperor's decision to punish those responsible for burning down a synagogue in Callinicum, a town on the Euphrates. To strengthen his case, Ambrose lists cities where Jews had burned churches: Gaza, Ascalon, Beirut, Alexandria. The outcome of the Callinicum affair seems to have brought the emperors to reaffirm in legal documents the right of Jews to meet unhindered in their synagogues, as did, for instance, Theodosius himself in 393.

Two examples of ecclesiastical policy discouraging social interaction between Jews and Christians may be mentioned. The Council of Elvira, held in early fourth-century Spain, had forbidden intermarriage between Christians and Jews. The Council of Vannes, in Gaul, meeting between 461 and 491, stated that it was "shameful and sacrilegious for Christians to eat [Jews'] food." In doing so, the Council was applying against Jews in reverse, as it were, the strong Jewish limitations on social contact with Christians.

A particularly striking document on the wave of violence against Jews, up to forced conversion, is the remarkable letter written by Severus, the bishop of Minorca. In his *Letter Concerning the Jews*, Severus recounts how the Jewish community on the island was converted to Christianity in 418. A polemic between Christians and Jews soon turns into a street battle, ending in the burning of the synagogue. Severus notes, however, that the Christian arsonists took great care to save the holy books from the fire. He concludes his account by reporting that in the days following the burning of their synagogue, 540 Jews converted to Christianity out of fear for their lives, eventually building a church on the ruins of the synagogue. Even if this text cannot be taken at face value in all its details, it remains emblematic of the new state of affairs and reflects the deep worsening of

the Jews' status. From the same year, an imperial edict forbids Jews ("those living according to the Jewish superstition") to join the armed forces. The same edict, however, reaffirms their right to be legal advocates and town councilors.

VI

Palestine, as we have already mentioned, constituted a special case. From the beginning, Christianization on the emperor's direct orders had been particularly intensive there. In particular, geography had been modified through a series of churches that punctuated the landscape, defining it as a "holy land." Places hallowed by the earthly presence of Jesus and of his mother, but also of the patriarchs, became landmarks which underlined that the "promised land," (*terra repromissionis*) of the Jews, to use Jerome's term, had now become the Land of *verus Israel*. This transformation of the land was visible in places such as Galilee or Hebron, but it was nowhere more obvious than in Jerusalem, a city from which Jews, who had been expelled by the pagan Roman emperors, remained officially excluded. One would have therefore thought that Byzantine Palestine would not be a place where Jewish culture could thrive. And yet, the evidence points to the opposite. Literary creativity produced an impressive series of works. The Palestinian Talmud (or most of it) was redacted in Tiberias during the fourth century. Some of the major works of midrashic literature, such as *Genesis Rabbah* and *Leviticus Rabbah*, stem from fifth-century Byzantine Palestine. The origins of synagogal poetry, the *piyyut*, are to be found there also. Yose ben Yose, the first *paytan* (from Greek *poiētēs*) whose name is known to us, for instance, lived in Palestine during the early fifth century.

Jerome, who lived in Jerusalem and Bethlehem from the 380s until his death in 419, carried on in Palestine a dialogue that he had begun in Rome with rabbis and Jewish converts. His major interest in pursuing his contacts with Jews was intellectual in nature. First, he needed them as teachers of Hebrew, a language he never quite succeeded in mastering, despite his constant efforts. Secondly, he wanted to learn from them about various hermeneutical and exegetical traditions of the biblical text. *Hebraica veritas*: Jerome's motto singled him out as a philologist in a world that did not particularly appreciate, or even understand, such an urge.[19] Indeed, his correspondence with Augustine reveals how the latter remained unable to understand Jerome's efforts to read the Bible in the original Hebrew. (Jerome appears here to be a lonely figure, also in his dealings with Jews, but he is following Origen, an earlier biblical exegete.) Jerome's contacts

with Jews, however, do not seem to have helped him develop any sympathy for them. Regular contacts, indeed, have never represented a panacea against ethnic, religious, or community tensions.

Archaeological remains, which often reflect a more positive image of the interaction between communities than polemics, also reflect a blossoming of Jewish communities, groups that did not shun cultural influences from the surrounding world. Jews and Christians lived both in towns (except Jerusalem as a rule) and villages. In Tiberias, the seat of the Jewish patriarchs until 420, the spread of Christianity seems to have been inhibited for some time. The villages were often mixed, but there seems to have been a tendency toward separation between the communities in these villages. Synagogue mosaics from Byzantine Palestine, in particular, show an impressive ability to play with non-Jewish themes. While such themes are not directly Christian, it is highly plausible that they sometimes reflect use among Christians, hence echoing the polemical dialogue between the two communities. One instance may be the depiction of the *Akedah* on the floor of the Beit Alpha synagogue. The importance of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac among Jews of late antiquity might well reflect its centrality among Christians, for whom Isaac (as well as the ram) was a *typos*, or *sacramentum futuri*, of Jesus Christ.[20]

VII

Midrashic Hebrew literature is a literary genre *sui generis*, which was born in late antiquity and continued to develop throughout the Middle Ages. The fact that it was composed and redacted orally, and only later committed to writing, makes the exact dating of the texts quite difficult. Yet it is possible to establish that some of the earliest and most important collections of Midrashim date from Byzantine Palestine. It has been suggested, again recently by Nicholas de Lange, that the *Midrash* genre offers striking similarities to the series, or *catenae* ("chains"), of patristic interpretations of biblical texts.[21] It so happens that the first *catenae* were also composed in late fifth-century or early sixth-century Palestine. Procopius of Gaza (ca 465–ca 530) apparently created this genre, in which he worked the different exegetes into a sort of continuous interpretation, in which the wordings of all of them appeared.[22] Some kind of contact between the two phenomena is plausible, but we must not forget their common ground: "secular" rather than "pagan" culture, as can be seen in Gaza. Only a comparative study, however, might be able to find an answer to the link between them.

We are still far from understanding the mythopoietic process involved in the formation of midrashic literature. We do not even know their original purpose: were the collections of *midrashim* meant to be used as "raw material" for the preparation of homilies? Obviously, they were taught (and learned by heart) in rabbinic education, as they would not otherwise have been preserved before they were committed to writing. Various *midrashim* show at least a blurred consciousness of Christian doctrines. Does this indicate that they were redacted as offering a Jewish answer to Christian biblical interpretation? Similarly, we still do not know the original function of the *catenae*, although they may well have been used for homiletic purposes.

In any case, both genres show the extent to which Jews and Christians, in Byzantine Palestine, shared a very similar hermeneutical tradition of the same texts, even though they were reading them and commenting upon them in different languages. Indeed, the idea of a common life, or *koinos bios*, should refer not only to the material aspects of life, but also to intellectual and spiritual life, to patterns of mind and of religious life. The case for such an intellectual and spiritual *koinos bios* might be made, of course, for all the various groups living in Byzantine Palestine, including Samaritans and polytheists, both Hellenized and Bedouins. But it is all the more true about Jews and Christians.

The comparative study of synagogal and Byzantine liturgical poetry (respectively *piyyut* and *kontakia*), which has barely begun, might also shed light on the dynamics between minority and majority culture in Byzantine Palestine. We have here, in both cases, a highly sophisticated literary genre whose origins remain unclear. The audience of the *piyyut* (from Greek *poiēsis*) must have been educated Jews, who would have memorized the Bible. Note that the word itself testifies to the acculturation process in which the phenomenon belongs. The *piyyut* offers unambiguous evidence for the rabbinization of liturgical practice in sixth-century Palestine, as Seth Schwartz reminds us (he also points out that we do not know how widespread the practice was).[23]

Following Pirkoi ben Baboi (ninth-tenth century Babylonia), Steven Bowman has speculated that *piyyutim* offered a legitimate way (since it was done within the legally permitted synagogal cult) to study the law through a poetic summary. This argument takes into account Justinian's Novella 146, promulgated in 553, forbidding the study of the *deuterōsis* (a term that does not refer exclusively to the Mishna but is a generic term referring to commentaries).[24] This law also interfered with Jewish cult (something unheard of until then) by demanding the use of specific biblical translations and threatening those who denied resurrection, the last judgment, and the angels. Justinian also enforced baptism upon the Jews. The Novella may have been meant as the Emperor's retaliation for the Jews' support of the

Donatists and the Arian Visigoths. Procopius tells us that it was then that the treasures of the Temple were brought from Rome to Constantinople.

One should also analyze the *piyyut* together with other kinds of Christian poetry, such as Ephrem's hymns. We know from Chrysostom, after all, that at least in late fourth-century Antioch, Christians could participate in synagogal services more than was acceptable to the clergy. Similar attitudes may have appeared in Byzantine Palestine or elsewhere. In 407, Theodosius, Arcadius, and Honorius issued a law against "the new crime of superstition" of "the unheard name of heaven worshippers (*caelicolae*)." The name of this group active in the early fifth century might point to their identity as later followers of the Judaizers of old, the *theosebeis*, or God fearers, *yir'ei shamaim* (*phoboumenoi, metuentes*).

IX

For both Christians and Jews, the political borders of the Roman Empire were far from coinciding with linguistic boundaries. The Jews of North Africa, Italy, Gaul, or Spain, who left so few written traces of their thought or literary creativity, spoke Latin. In the great cities of the eastern part of the Empire, for instance in Asia Minor, Jews spoke Greek. In the Near East, however, including in Palestine, they usually spoke Aramaic, like the native Christians, who cultivated their own version of Aramaic, Syriac. In that sense, the special case of Palestine may be misleading, since there the Christian elites often spoke Greek. The Jewish elites understood Greek, as Origen's dealings with the rabbis in Caesarea Maritima show (these were obviously carried on in Greek). And yet, Greek was not the rabbis' language of written expression. In the Syrian Orient, however, Jews and Christians shared more or less the same language, Aramaic, which had been the *lingua franca* of the area for a long time. This was the case on both sides of the political border between the Romans and the Sasanians.

The essential difference in the linguistic scene between Jews and Christians is, of course, a matter of weight. It is in Greek, and sometimes in Latin, that the leading Christian thinkers expressed their theologies. Other Christian literatures—Syriac in particular, but also Coptic and Armenian—are very rich; yet they remain marginal to the centers of political power in the Empire. For the Jews of the East, in contradistinction, literary creativity took place in Aramaic and Hebrew. There are no literary remains whatsoever of the powerful Jewish communities who spoke either Greek or Latin. The striking disappearance of Hellenistic Jewish literary culture, already noted by Joseph Justus Scaliger, remains to this day a historical puzzle. On the face of it, the Jewish communities in the Byzantine Empire would appear to be the direct heirs of Hellenistic Judaism.

This sharing of a language is clearly meaningful for the Jewish and Christian Northern Syrian and Mesopotamian communities (in both cases minorities that were sometimes persecuted), where geographical proximity adds to the probability that some degree of mutual cultural influence and interdependence of literary works remains. Scholars have long searched Syriac literature for evidence of rabbinic influences. In the fourth century,

one of the early major Syriac authors, Aphrahat, known as “the Persian sage,” retains in his *Demonstrations* various traces of rabbinic exegetical traditions.[25]

What Jews and Christians had in common was, of course, first and foremost, Jewish Scripture (although Christians read it only in translation). But the Bible was also what divided them. To a great extent the history of the cultural relationships between them is the history of Jewish–Christian polemics in their biblical exegesis. Much has been said about Jewish influences on Christian exegesis in late antiquity. Günter Stemberger has duly noted the "highly excessive claims" made in the early days of scholarship regarding the dependence of the church fathers on the rabbis. On the other hand, he adds, possible Christian influences on Jewish exegesis in late antiquity have never been explored in a systematic way. To be sure, it must not be assumed that the relationship was symmetrical.[26] Altogether, it is probable that more information flowed from Jews to Christians than vice versa, either directly (both Origen and Jerome, to name two obvious cases, tell us of their use of Jewish "native informants") or indirectly (echoes of *midrashim* in Aphrahat or of Philo in Ambrose, for instance).

While concern with Judaism was central to Christian theology, the reverse is not true. Yet, the Jews surely were painfully conscious of the obvious success of Christianity, which had first claimed their scripture, then conquered the empire, and finally begun to humiliate them in some very concrete ways. Similarly, they must have been aware of the way in which Christian theologians interpreted at least some crucial biblical texts. Hence, in some cases, Jewish biblical interpretation reflects—and is meant to refute—Christian perceptions.

It has recently been argued that if Jewish life seems to have been so flourishing in Byzantine Palestine, this is because the Christianization of the Empire was one of the main causes of what Schwartz calls "the re-judaization of the Jews."[27] At the same time as the emperors marginalized Jews, they empowered them. In other words, in the pagan Roman Empire, Jews were much less limited in the spectrum of possible cultural and religious postures. For them, eclecticism meant acculturation. The emperor promoted religious rigidity and uniformity among Christians, through the definition as heretical of any deviant teaching or behavior (with its radical

legal consequences). This attitude also had an effect on Jews, now defined, more than ever before, as a community. In this community, too, the process of "orthodoxization" forced aside and sought to erase every attempt at deviance. It is only in the fourth century, then, that we may speak of the emergence of a single Jewish culture. Similarly, Martin Goodman has spoken of the end of the fourth century as representing, for Jews, "the end of uncertainty." Until then, he argues, one should retain serious skepticism about the applicability of rabbinic evidence outside the immediate circles of the rabbis.[28]

Schwartz's powerful argument sees in the Jewish cultural explosion of late antiquity a response, in some complex ways, to the gradual Christianization of the Roman Empire. Yet, his study does not account for the significance of the Talmudic movement, at the same time, in Babylonia. While we have no archaeological remains of the Babylonian Jewish communities, we may assume that the cultural blossoming reflected by the Babylonian Talmud was not singularly literary. We must also look for cultural interaction between Jews and Christians in the Sasanian Empire. There such interaction can perhaps be studied more easily (although only in a rather speculative way, alas, as the sources are terribly scarce), since we are dealing with two rather comparable minorities. In this context, it may be worth referring to the name for Christians in Pehlevi: *tarsak* (lit. "fearer"). Shlomo Pines has proposed that we see in this name a trace of the origins of Christianity in Iran, which would have developed through the Jewish communities there.[29] Mesopotamian Jews and Christians shared the same language, Aramaic, a major fact which goes a long way in explaining their cultural relationship in the East. Indeed, as J. B. Segal noted long ago:

> The early advance of Christianity in Mesopotamia was upon ground already prepared by the Jews. It was in a great degree the intellectual and cultural resources of Mesopotamian Jewry that enabled the Aramean strain in the Church of Edessa to stand aloof from the violent theological controversies that took place before the fifth century.

Segal adds that "in the course of time, the Jewish and the Christian communities had moved far apart."[30] We should look for cultural interaction between Jews and Christians in Babylonia not only in explicit theology and hermeneutics, but also in mystical theology and praxis.

XI

Some striking similarities between early Christian and Jewish mystical texts and traditions also reflect the religious dynamics between Jews and Christians.[31] “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” (Matt. 5:8). The sixth beatitude of the Sermon on the Mount set the agenda for two millennia of Christian mysticism. In Christian territory, the vision of God is possible, but under certain conditions, having to do with both purity and interiority. The beatitude also points to the origin of the Christian ideal of seeing God: the Jewish background of the Sermon on the Mount. Like Christianity, rabbinic Judaism was born in the first century CE. Therefore, studying the early development of mysticism in the two religions from a comparative perspective should help.

In the first stages of Jewish mysticism, which Gershom Scholem referred to (rather misleadingly) as “Jewish Gnosticism,”[32] one can identify three main visual trajectories:

1. The vision of God’s Body, usually referred to as *Shi‘ur Qoma*
2. The vision of God’s Palace (or Palaces: *Hekhalot* literature)
3. The vision of God’s Chariot, or *Merkavah* (referring to Ezekiel, chapter 1).

The exact dating of the late ancient Hebrew texts developing these themes is notoriously difficult. We are condemned to remain in the *longue durée*, where the most one can do is call attention to shared trajectories and to structural similarities of the main themes in early Jewish mysticism to various patristic texts. Nevertheless, it seems that such similarities developed mainly during our period, in particular within Christian milieus less touched by Platonist patterns of thought—which permitted a completely spiritual perception of the *visio mystica*. What counts in our perspective is to insist that mystical traditions, even if they start earlier, continue during our period.

A preliminary investigation of structural and thematic similarities between Jewish and Christian mystical traditions in late antiquity brings enough circumstantial evidence to show the plausibility of contacts between the two mystical traditions. Only a systematic study of sources could detect

the extent to which patristic references reflect knowledge of rabbinic sources or traditions. A final caveat: similarities and parallels do not necessarily point to influences, as we are dealing with two traditions both rooted in biblical exegesis. Moreover, the sustained research that it needs will have to deal with the *Sitz im Leben* of mystical traditions among Jews and Christians in our period. Texts outside of context remain meaningless. The significant questions relate to the function of these texts in religious praxis. What we should seek to understand better, ultimately, is a puzzling chapter in the history of religious dynamics between Jews and Christians.

XII

One can perhaps extrapolate, *mutatis mutandis*, from the few examples of contacts between mystical stances among Christians and Jews to other fields of cultural contact. Mystical experience, at least what we can know from our sources, was a matter for intellectuals, or at least religious virtuosi. Education, religious law, and theology are fields in which it is plausible to expect some kind of cultural dynamics between the elites of the two communities. Despite the deep lack of symmetry between them, stemming from the fact that political power was in the hands of the Christians, and from the lack among the Jews of priests and monks or nuns, interesting similarities can be observed.

Polemics is perhaps even more difficult to use because we do not possess a single autonomous Jewish voice and what we hear from the Christians is usually what they like to say when they write against the Jews. In Babylonia, at least, the Jews had over the years established some kind of educational system (the *yeshivot*, or Talmudic academies), but this system was organized on principles greatly different from those of the Christian academies in the East, such as the one in Nisibis. The variance is due, essentially, to the lack of Greek philosophy in the literary canon of the Jews and to the huge contrast in the expression of theological thought that ensued. The two systems of theological education must have remained quite impermeable to one another—except for Jewish converts to Christianity (we do not hear of any Christian convert to Judaism in our period). In the West, as well as in the East, the monasteries began to offer a parallel educational system, which gave up the grounding in the classical *paideia*. Without Greek philosophy, Jewish theology remained, to a great extent, implicit, and focused upon religious law. Christians, on the other hand, focused upon theological debate, usually linked to opposing heresies of all sorts, leaving law, mainly, to imperial legislation.

The whole field of popular piety, magic, and holy men must be considered. The evidence for relationships between the two groups is here much less ambiguous than in theological or mystical thought, although the lack of sources here remains even more dire than elsewhere. Jewish holy men played in their community, *mutatis mutandis*, a role similar to that played by Christian holy men in their community. Popular religion is in many ways a problematic concept, postulating a dubious two-tiered hierarchy. But, there is certainly a middle ground, a "religious *koinē*," where Jews and Christians (and not only they) meet, both in an urban context and in the villages. The clearest example of such a religious "commonwealth" is probably the role of magical beliefs and practices. The magical papyri from Egypt, both in Greek and in Coptic, show a considerable amount of religious syncretism and interest in showing off Jewish (or "Hebrew-sounding") theophoric words and names. New discoveries of Aramaic magic bowls from late ancient Mesopotamia highlight such common practices of Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and others, such as Mandaeans or Manichaeans.[33]

As noted, the real common ground of Christians and Jews in late antiquity was not so much the Old Testament, which offered the major cause for the permanent clashes between them. It was, rather, the ground they shared with the other communities throughout the Mediterranean and the Near East, a *tertium quid* that did not reflect any specific religious identity. The innumerable and invisible demons which magic practices were meant to tame did not really belong to either the realm of God or that of Satan. They were, simply, part of the structure of the universe, as objective as sun and moon, rain and drought.

Underlying the conflicting theological and ethnic identities, there existed in the late ancient Mediterranean and Near East what I have called a "religious *koinē*" of shared implicit assumptions. This "religious commonwealth" was primarily magical beliefs and practices. It is almost impossible to disentangle religion from magic, at least in the ancient world; yet too often scholars have assumed magic to belong to the sphere of "popular religion," leaving the higher spheres of theology "intact." The role

of the *Chaldean Oracles* and the place of theurgy in later Neoplatonism would be sufficient to cast serious doubts on such a view. In late antiquity, magic apparently moved up and became more readily acceptable to the higher classes, including the intellectuals. Certainly both the church fathers and the rabbis strongly condemn magic, which they usually consider as the alien, doubtful, and dangerous religiosity of the other. But, a closer investigation shows that their own attitudes also accept the principles of magical thought and practice. Recent scholarship has shown a broad diffusion of magic among both Palestinian and Babylonian Jews, and among the rabbis. Magical power is part of the holy man’s charisma, also among the desert monks. From Egypt through Palestine to Babylonia, spells, formulae, bowls, and papyri provide a glimpse of a wide spectrum of magic themes and practices. In this respect, there are some obvious links between magic and mysticism, reflected both in Jewish and in Christian texts.

XIV

In conclusion, we may ask whether, at the end of our period, the relationship between Jews and Christians was more or less significant than it had been at its start. There is no doubt that it was different. Jews in the Christianized Roman Empire were now clearly reduced to a more or less stable nadir, a state of total weakness and humiliation to which they would be confined for more than a millenium, until at least the Emancipation. Both in the Latin West and in the Greek East, they seem to have generated much less interest for theologians than in antiquity. Christians no longer expected conversion, as when Theodoret had noted, in the fifth century, that the Jews struck a disturbing note in an ecumene that saw the conversion of various exotic peoples to Christianity. Christian writers certainly seem to know much less about Judaism and about Jewish exegetical traditions than in previous generations. To a great extent later Byzantine and Latin polemical literature reflects this state of affairs.

In the Near East, however, the situation was different, as the Christians had in their turn been reduced in the new Islamic empire to a situation comparable to that of the Jews. For eastern Christians, the nemesis was now Ishmael, not Israel. For John of Damascus, the worst heresy is the most recent one, that of the Ishmaelites.[34] Jews do not seem to overly concern him. But such an attitude is also shared by Christians in the Byzantine Empire, who would now seek to redefine themselves religiously and politically in relation to the emerging competition with Islam. The contenders without (the Muslims) had replaced, to a great extent, the contenders within (the Jews).

The Trophies of Damascus, a Greek work of anti-Jewish polemics redacted in 681, exemplifies the new locus of the relationship between Jews and Christians. The scene of the *disputatio* takes place in an urban context, within a public space, and is attended not only by Christians and Jews (different kinds of them), but also by Saracens, heretics, and Samaritans. We have here a whole spectrum of communities, united by their common self-definition as “religions of the book,” and fighting, as it were, a hermeneutical *joute courtoise*. Soon, Arabic would replace Greek and Aramaic as the sole *lingua franca* of the East, permitting, after many

centuries, the return of the Jews to a shared intellectual life and hence a renewal of Jewish dialectical theology, putting it on a par with Christian thought. Jews and Christians, now both *dhimmi* communities, would soon become engaged in redefining the parameters of cultural and religious life through an intensive movement of translations. A new intellectual relationship between them would then become possible.

[1] Augustine, *Enn. Ps*. 56.9; cf. 40.14 and *Hom*. 5.5, cited by Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), ch. 1, n. 35.

[2] John of Ephesus, *Lives of Eastern Saints*, 16 (Patrologia Orientalis, 17:234). See ch. 1 "The End of Sacrifice," section III above.

[3] Eusebius Caesariensis, *Life of Constantine*, GCS—*Eusebius Werke*, Bd 1, 4.27. For an English translation of this text, see Eusebius of Caesarea, *Life of Constantine*, trans. and comm. Averil Cameron and Stuart Hall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

[4] On the laws pertaining to the Jews, see Amnon Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1987).

[5] See Robert Louis Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), chs 3 and 4. On *dhimmis*, see Claude Cahen, "Dhimma", in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 2 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), pp. 227a–231a.

[6] See Guy G. Stroumsa, "Religious Contacts in Byzantine Palestine," *Numen* 36 (1989), 16–42.

[7] See Antoine Fattal, *Le Statut légal des non-musulmans en pays d'Islam* (Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1958).

[8] For Byzantine anti-Jewish polemics, see Andreas Külzer, *Disputationes graecae contra Iudaeos: Untersuchungen zur byzantinischen antijüdischen Dialogliteratur und ihrem Judenbild* (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1999). For the relationship of the Byzantine emperors to Israelite kingship, see Gilbert Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, trans. Jean Dirrell (Cambridge. and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[9] See Brian McGing, "Population and Proselytism: How Many Jews Were There in the Ancient World?," in *Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman Cities*, ed. John R. Bartlett (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 88–106.

[10] See P. Fredriksen and Oded Irshai, "Christian Anti-Judaism, Polemics and Policies: From the Second to the Seventh Century," in *Cambridge History of Judaism*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 977–1035.

[11] Galit Hasan-Rokem, *Tales of the Neighborhood: Jewish Narrative Dialogues in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

[12] See e.g. Hugh Kennedy, "Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia," in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, ed. Averil Cameron, Bryan Ward-Perkins, and Michael Whitby (Cambridge: University Press, 2000), pp. 588–611; Shaye Cohen, "Jews and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World," in *Early*

Judaism and Its Modern Interpreters, ed. Robert Kraft and George Nickelsburg (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), pp. 33–56.

[13] See Garth Fowden, "Religious Communities," in *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Post-Classical World*, ed. G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 82–106.

[14] See Guy G. Stroumsa, "Early Christianity: A Religion of the Book?," in *Homer, the Bible, and Beyond: Literary and Religious Canons in the Ancient World*, ed. Margalit Finkelberg and Guy G. Stroumsa, Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture, 2 (Leiden and Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2003), pp. 153–73.

[15] See Arthur Darby Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933).

[16] See Seth Schwartz, "Rabbinisation in the Sixth Century," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, vol. 3, ed. Peter Schäfer and Catherine Hezser (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), pp. 55–69.

[17] See Jacob Neusner, *Judaism and Christianity in the Age of Constantine: History, Messiah, Israel, and the Initial Confrontation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) and Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999).

[18] On the oral redaction of religious texts in late antiquity, see Shaul Shaked, James Nathan Ford, and Siam Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls*, Magical and Religious Literature of Late Antiquity, 1 (Leiden and Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2013), Introduction, pp. 2–6.

[19] On Jerome and *hebraica veritas*, see Alfons Fürst, *Hieronymus: Askese und Wissenschaft in der Spätantike* (Freiburg: Herder, 2003), pp. 102–6 and bibl. 216–317, as well as Raúl González Salinero, *Biblia y polémica antijudía en Jerónimo* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2003), pp. 53–91.

[20] See Guy G. Stroumsa, "Christ's Laughter: Docetic Origins Reconsidered," in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12 (2004), 267–88. See further Stroumsa, "Herméneutique biblique et identité: l'exemple d'Isaac," *Revue Biblique* 99 (1992), 529–43.

[21] Nicholas de Lange, "Midrach et Byzance. Une traduction française du *Midrach Rabba*," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 206 (1989), 171–81. See further de Lange, "Jews and Christians in the Byzantine Empire: Problems and Prospects," in *Chistianity and Judaism*, ed. D. Wood (Oxford: Published for the Ecclesiastical History Society by Blackwell, 1992), pp. 15–32.

[22] See *The Palestinian Catena on Psalm 118*, SC 189: 7.

[23] Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton, N.J. and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 263.

[24] On Justinian's Novella 154, see for instance Leonard Rutgers, "Justinian's Novella 146, between Jews and Christians," in *Jewish Culture and Society Under the Christian Roman Empire*, ed. Richard Lee Kalmin and Seth Schwartz, Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Culture and Religion, 3 (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), pp. 385–407. See further Steven Bowman, "The Jews in Byzantium," in *Cambridge History of Judaism*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 1035–52.

[25] See James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism* (Cleveland; World Pub. Co.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961), pp. 276–8. Jacob Neusner, who claims that Aphrahat and the rabbis had nothing in common, remains a lonely voice.

[26] See Günter Stemberger, "Exegetical Contacts between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire," in *Hebrew Bible—Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation*, ed. Magne Saebø, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), pp. 569–687.

[27] See Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, esp. part 3, ch. 1.

[28] Martin Goodman, "Jews and Judaism in the Mediterranean Diaspora in the Late-Roman Period: The Limitations of Evidence," *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 4 (1994), 208–24.

[29] Shlomo Pines, *The Iranian Name for Christians and the "God-Fearers"* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1967).

[30] J. B. Segal, "Mesopotamian Communities from Julian to the Rise of Islam," in *Proceedings of the British Academy* 41 (1955) 109–39.

[31] See Guy G. Stroumsa, "To See or Not to See: On the Early History of the *Visio Beatifica*," in *Wege mystischer Gotteserfahrung/Mystical Approaches to God*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Schriften des Historischen Kollegs Kolloquien, 65 (Oldenburg: Historisches Kolleg Munich, 2006), pp. 67–80.

[32] Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*. (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965 [1960]).

[33] See Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1993).

[34] See Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: The "Heresy of the Ishmaelites"* (Leiden: Brill, 1972).

God’s Rule in Late Antiquity

We have seen in Chapter 6 how late antique Jewish and Christian communities developed conflicting relations and how these two monotheistic religions drew vastly different conclusions from the idea of the one God, creator and ruler of the universe. We shall presently analyze some of the implications of the law and the rule of God.

The relationship between religious authority and political power is a major problem in all societies. As the question is framed differently in each cultural and historical context, the solutions represent a very broad spectrum. Since the Enlightenment, “theocracy” is often used—pejoratively—in order to refer to those political regimes where an established religion plays a central role. This is, however, a rather vague use of the term which, historically, refers only to the direct rule of the one God in the society that obeys his Law. In other words, “theocracy” strictly understood only refers to societies established upon a monotheistic religion. In other cases, for instance, in the polytheistic societies of the ancient Near East, one should speak of “sacred kingship” rather than of theocracy.[1]

Now, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam obviously share some significant features, or what Wittgenstein called “family resemblances,” both from a historical and from a structural viewpoint. At the same time, the three main Abrahamic religions reflect strikingly different historical and cultural experiences. Moreover, each of these religions has also undergone, throughout its history, a number of radical transformations which render any hypostatic approach highly problematic. The similarities are sometimes greater between Judaism and Christianity (such as the Hebrew Bible), or between Judaism and Islam (such as the centrality of legal aspects of religion), or else between Christianity and Islam (such as the cardinal role of the relationship between religious and political authority). The relationship between religious authority and political power is framed very differently in each of the three Abrahamic religions.[2] “Theocracy,” indeed, means different things in the various Jewish, Christian, and Islamic contexts

throughout history. This chapter will focus on the late antique formative period of the Abrahamic religions and seek to shed some light on the relationship between religious and political authority in the late antique world, in particular around the birth of Islam.[3]

I

As is well known, the concept of *theokratia* (a very rare term in Greek) first appears in Josephus's polemical work *Against Apion* (II. 155–73 and 184–5). Josephus, who seems to have invented the term, uses it to describe the unique pattern of political organization of the ancient Hebrews.[4] According to Josephus, Moses, the legislator (*nomothetēs*) of the Hebrews, who had God as his guide and counselor, rejected all known political systems, such as monarchy or democracy, and decided to place all sovereignty and authority in the hands of God. Josephus adds that the Greek philosophers, such as Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Plato, and the Stoics, were all students of Moses in that matter. In radical distinction from the Hebrew model, however, the Greek philosophers retained an esoteric character to their political conceptions, only revealing their true views to their advanced students and hiding them from the public at large. Josephus adds that one of the characteristics of the Law of Moses was the fact that for him religion was not, as elsewhere, "a department of virtue," but, on the contrary, religion was for the Hebrews all-encompassing and ethics had become part of religion (*eusebeia*). This is, of course, a point of vital importance, entailing a major transformation of the status of religion in society. For Philo, in contradistinction to Josephus, Moses was not only a legislator, but also a prophet. Although Philo does not speak of *theokratia*, he describes the Hebrew polity established by Moses as being under the direct leadership of God. Although it cannot be argued with certainty, there is, therefore, a real possibility that Josephus was influenced by Philo's discussion in his own work.

At the time of Josephus's writing, in the 90s of the first century CE in Rome, Jewish theocracy belonged to the past. The destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE and the military defeat of the Jews in their war against the Romans had crushed any serious aspiration to renewed political independence of the Jewish nation. This military catastrophe would soon be followed, in the 30s of the second century, by another defeat in the second revolt against Rome, which obliterated the dream for a Jewish national renewal in Palestine. From then on, and until the birth of the modern Jewish national movement in the late nineteenth century, Jews would more or less

give up on the political expression of Jewish identity.[5] Even the theoretical discussion of political regimes and legitimacy remains embryonic in late antique and medieval Jewish literature. In late antique rabbinic literature (both from Babylonia and from Palestine), the figure of the sage had replaced both that of the priest and that of the prophet. Discussion of the Temple law and of sacrificial practices has an eerie character about it, at best referring to an uncertain reconstruction of the Temple in the eschatological future. The rabbis expressed very little interest in political reflection, while Jewish medieval philosophers and theologians, such as Maimonides, when they dealt with the political dimension of the Israelite commonwealth, referred to their highly speculative reconstruction of the biblical world. For all practical purposes, the rabbis had put aside political ambitions, focusing rather on the development of personal piety, family religion, and, at most, the judicial autonomy of Jewish communities. In Weberian terms, one could speak of the radical "depoliticization," or *Entpolitisierung* of Judaism, and hence of the disappearance of the state.[6] Under such conditions, it is obvious that theocracy is not a real option, and that the term has no concrete relevance.

For the Jews, then, after the destruction of the Temple, the idea of theocracy primarily belonged to the past. The past is also projected in the eschatological future, the messianic times. Then, the former glorious state of affairs will be reinstated and the Temple rebuilt. The Messiah himself is certainly a "theocratic" figure, as he will establish the kingdom of God upon the earth.

II

It is in the context of *entpolitisiert* Judaism that Christianity was born. In this case things were even worse as the Christians had lost even that modicum of recognition that was given to the Jews by the Romans on behalf of their own traditions, their *patrioi nomoi*. Christians remained until Constantine followers of a *religio illicita*, while Jews retained certain rights as long as the Empire remained pagan.

Jesus's injunction in the Gospels: "Render unto Caesar…" (Matt. 22: 15–22; Mark 12: 13–17; Luke 20: 20–6), is the obvious starting point for any discussion of the conception of the relationship between "church" and "state" in early Christianity.[7] Two fundamentally different attitudes would evolve from the radical distinction between the realm of Caesar and that of God. On the one hand, one could argue that if the two realms have nothing in common, then the duties to the first do not contradict those to the second. The radical distinction between the two realms renders an arrangement between religious and political authorities possible. Until the fourth century, Christian thinkers would all reiterate the radical nature of Christian life, to be understood only in contradistinction or even direct opposition to the evil powers of this world. The different dualistic and Gnostic trends, in this sense, reflect the most clearly expressed theoretical attitude among Christians. Vis-à-vis the "earthly city" (*civitas terrena*), more or less identified, since John's Apocalypse, with Satan's realm, only the "city of God" (*civitas Dei*), the true realm in which Christians are citizens, stood firm. There was no third possibility: *tertium non datur*. The only alternative was that of behavior. Both a passive and an active attitude vis-à-vis the evil rulers of this world could be developed. The passive attitude reflected in the Gospel's injunction quoted above could also be adopted by Gnostic thinkers: in the attempt to escape the evil powers which rule the world, all means can be considered legitimate.[8] Paying Caesar his due does not legitimize his power; rather, it permits avoiding his wrath. A similar attitude of cryptic religious identity will be repeated, in different guises, by both Muslims and Jews in various historical contexts. In Shi'ite Islam, such an attitude is known as *taqiya*, hiding one's true beliefs when under the political rule of Sunni enemies. In medieval Christian Spain (as well as

under the Almohads), the prohibition of Judaism would lead to the phenomenon of crypto-Jews (commonly called in a Christian context Marannos), outwardly Christians (or Muslims), but retaining their Jewish beliefs (as well as some practices) in secret.

Activist behavior, probably less common among early Christians than passive, would have a stronger impact on Christian self-perception, however: accepting, or even seeking, martyrdom in order to affirm one's faith in the face of religious intolerance and persecution. A particularly clear example of such behavior, highlighting its direct implications for political power, is offered by the *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*. This text, the earliest Latin Christian document to have reached us, refers to a hearing which took place at Carthage on 17 July 180.

The proconsul Saturninus addresses the Christian Speratus in the following terms:

> If you begin to malign our sacred rites, I shall not listen to you. But swear rather by the Genius of our lord the emperor.

Speratus answers:

> I do not recognize the empire of this world. Rather, I serve that God whom no man has seen, nor can see, with these eyes. I have not stolen; and on any purchase I pay the tax, for I acknowledge my lord who is the emperor of kings and of all nations.[9]

As we have seen, the radical opposition to political power exemplified in this text was not the only possible attitude before Constantine. And yet, it reflects the fact that, for early Christians, the sphere of politics and that of religion had little in common. In such a context, the very idea of theocracy seems quite preposterous. It would take Constantine's revolution, and its theological interpretation by Eusebius of Caesarea, to imagine the Roman emperor as the representative of God upon earth. Eusebius wrote his *Tricennalia* on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of Constantine's reign. Referring to this text, Polymnia Athanassiadi has recently noted, *en passant*, that it anticipates the concept of the caliphate.[10] This off-hand remark is worth reflecting upon. If one sees earliest Islam within the broad picture of late antiquity, it stands to reason to assume that many of the characteristics of Islam in its earliest stages did not appear *ex nihilo*, but might be better understood within the background of late antique religious

phenomena. More precisely, as we have noted previously, and as we shall see in Chapter 8, contemporary research emphasizes, besides traditional paganism, the importance of monotheistic trends in religious thought in the Arabian peninsula, at least since the fourth century.[11]

For early Christian views of the relationship between state and religion, then, one must make a radical distinction between the pre-Constantinian and the post-Constantinian periods. Before Constantine, it remained a matter of the eschatological future. And yet, even after the conversion of the Empire, at a time when theocracy had become the common state of affairs, the idea would never become quite natural in Christianity. Indeed, traces of the radical opposition between the realm of God and that of political power never completely disappeared.[12] This was the case everywhere, although the tension between the political and the religious authorities would be expressed in rather different ways in Byzantium and in the medieval West.[13]

III

According to traditional understanding, the Caliph (*khalīfa*, from the root *kh.l.f.*, to replace) was in the early Islamic realm the supreme leader of the community (*umma*), replacing the prophet Muhammad. This view of things was challenged by Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, who argued in *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*, convincingly to my mind, that in the early Muslim texts the Caliph was perceived as God's deputy (*khalīfat Allāh fi-al-arḍ*), rather than following in Muhammad's footsteps. *Khalifat Allāah* was the original title of the Umayyad head of state, rather than *khalīfat rasul Allāh* ("Deputy of God's Apostle"), a title which makes its appearance under the Abbasids. Originally, then, the Caliph's authority comes directly from God.[14]

In her major synthetic study of Islamic political thought, Crone develops this thesis:

> an imam or caliph was a ruler who recognized all power as God's and used it in accordance with His will, and government by such a person accorded with the wishes of his subjects, for all believers accepted God's rule. By contrast, a king would treat his power as his private property…In short, *imama/khilafa* stood for theocracy, government by God, whereas *mulk* stood for autocracy, government by selfish, arbitrary, and shortsighted human beings.[15]

Crone notes that "the fusion (as opposed to blurring) of political and religious communities has not in fact been common in the history of complex societies at all." Crone further notes in this context that "Like everyone else in the Middle East, the Arabs were affected by the Hellenistic concept of kings as endowed with a fullness of power," adding that there was only one precedent to Muhammad's all-purpose community: Moses.[16] We will come back to the figure of Moses in late antiquity. It points to a major factor: it is within the Judeo-Christian context, rather than by using the diffuse concept of "sacred kingship," that we should search for the proximate channels for the formation of the early Islamic conception of the ideal ruler's theological-political realm.[17]

Suffice it to note, for our present purposes, that the political dimension of religion is much more straightforward in Islam than in either Judaism or Christianity. From the start, Muhammad's community, the Islamic *umma*, is

possessed at once of political and of religious dimensions. More precisely, spiritual and political leadership are to a great extent identical.

Among the Abrahamic religions, only for the Islamic community does the union of theological and political power seem to represent the natural, or ideal, state of affairs. Now, as we saw in Chapter 4, the early seventh century was a time of intense eschatological speculation among both Jews and Christians. One can argue, then, that to a certain extent Muhammad's conception of the *umma*'s leadership reflects the eschatological perception of things. In a sense, Muhammad's *umma* represents realized eschatology.[18]

IV

As we search for proximate channels of transmission of late antique conceptions to early Islam, we should draw particular attention to the eastern provinces of the Byzantine Empire. In this context, Philip Wood focuses on the "emergence of cultural independence in a region where Syriac, a barbarian language, achieved significance."[19] Wood adds that Myaphysite political thought displaces attributes of the emperor, as the guardian of Christianity and the preserver of orthodoxy, onto local holy men and non-Christian rulers. This explains, at least partly, how conceptions originally attached to the emperor could have been transferred in the pre-Islamic Near East to less distant, less abstract and alienated figures, closer to the local populations. Syriac Myaphysite conceptions could then more easily have an impact upon Muhammad's milieu.

We must now reflect upon the Christian discourse on theocracy in order to understand better the context in which the early Islamic attitude to religious and political authority was born. Indeed, the theocratic argument as developed by Eusebius, which then became the fundamental principle of Byzantine political thought, conceived God as "the great king" (*Tricennalia* I. 3; I. 5) celebrated by the whole cosmos. According to Eusebius, Constantine, the Christian emperor, represented the earthly image, or *eikōn* of God.[20] For him, the first Christian monarch becomes a new David, as the history of the church is for him a continuation of the biblical *historia sacra*.[21] In *Empereur et prêtre*, Gilbert Dagron has rightly insisted upon the fact that too much importance has been given in the past to the sacrality of Hellenistic kings and to the Roman concept of *pontifex maximus*.[22] For Dagron, the main source of Byzantine political thought is the Old Testament. This dramatic importance of the Hebrew Bible, much more marked than in the West, is also explained for him by the much stronger presence of Jewish communities in the Eastern Empire.

The traditional perception of the difference between the Byzantine and the Western medieval models of theological and political powers was long ago synthesized by Ernst Kantorowitz.[23] According to this rather simplistic categorization, the Western model distinguished between "the two powers," that of the church and that of the state, as autonomous from one another,

while in the East, there was a confusion between them.[24] *Cesaropapism* is a term invented by the German legal scholar Heinrich Boehmer (1674–1749) and often utilized, since the second half of the nineteenth century, in order to describe, in pejorative fashion, the Byzantine system.

Justinian's words when entering for the first time the newly completed church of Hagia Sophia, "I have surpassed thee, O Solomon," might well be apocryphal. It does not really matter. What counts, again, is the perception of the Byzantine emperor as an Old Testament figure. A new David and a new Solomon, the emperor is also modeled upon the first leader of the Hebrews: Moses.

Philo describes Moses as a *nomos empsychos*, an animated *nomos*, using a term usually reserved for Hellenistic kings. Clement takes over from Philo his description of Moses. For him, however, it is the only-begotten Son, the incarnated Logos, who is the best and true lawgiver, the perfect man, even higher than Moses.[25] The political theory of Philo, representing the Jewish version of Hellenistic political thought, thus becomes the basis of a Christian political philosophy. The Hebrew polity instituted by Moses becomes the model for a perfect society, far better than the other societies of the *oikoumenē*: "Moses furnished a good polity, which is the right discipline of men in social life."[26] Yet, the Christian thinker does not forget that Moses is but a figure of Christ, who alone represents perfection. Hence, if the Greek polity is brass, the Jewish polity is silver, and the Christian polity is gold.[27]

Here as elsewhere, Clement of Alexandria, toward the end of the second century, was deeply influenced by Philo. Like other Christian thinkers, Clement was convinced that Moses' preeminence over Greek and other pagan national and religious leaders was based upon his antecedence: the Jewish leader came first, just as the Hebrew language is older than Greek. A highly complex theory about the history of religions and cultures follows from Clement's conception. Clement appears, thus, also as a quite interesting, even original, historian of religions and cultures. I have dealt elsewhere with his conception of cultural memory, within which one must understand his perception of national and religious leaders of the past.[28]

To be sure, Clement's view of Moses is based upon that of Philo, Yet, Clement had specific reasons of his own for seeing Moses as the perfect lawgiver. Clement was a contemporary of Celsus, a Platonic philosopher

who is known to us through his anti-Christian tractate *Alēthēs Logos*—or, more precisely, through what remains of it in Origen's quotations in his *Contra Celsum*, written some seventy years later. Celsus had accused Christians of having given up the "ancestral laws" (*patrioi nomoi*) of the Jews, while claiming to retain their holy books. In a sense, then, Clement's description of Moses as the perfect *nomothetēs* reflects the polemics about the legitimacy of Christianity around the middle of the second century. In order to be accepted as a recognized religion (*religio licita*), it needed to show itself to be established upon an ancestral religious law. As Christian thinkers in general, and Platonists in particular, insisted on their allegorical reading of the Hebrew scriptures, which were supposed to be their religious law, Celsus could present a strong case against Christianity. It is in this context that one should see Clement's perception of Moses as both a religious and a political leader: he needs to defend Christianity from an overall allegorical reading of biblical history. In an article on Clement's view of the past, Raoul Mortley pointed out a noticeable lack of scholarly interest in Clement's ideas on history—and hence on Moses as a lawgiver and political leader.[29] For Mortley, this stemmed from the discrepancy between these views and the overall spirit of Clement's Platonic thought. It is precisely this discrepancy, correctly detected by Mortley, which highlights the significance of Clement's argument about Moses. Clement's perception of Moses is thus parallel to his view of Numa. Both are at once religious and political leaders: in the ancient world, religion has an inherent public dimension, and is then, essentially, *civil* religion.

V

Only a few patristic authors show in a significant way the influence of Clement's views of Moses as the earliest lawgiver. One of these is the anonymous author of the *Cohortatio ad Graecos*, a text attributed to Justin, but which probably stems from the fourth century.[30] According to this text, the Christian religious teachers, that is, Moses and the prophets, are older than any of the Greek poets and philosophers. Moses had been taught by Egyptian priests and it is through them that the Greeks were able to learn about Moses' views. In particular, Greek legislators, poets, and philosophers were intellectually dependent upon Moses. Plato, in particular, displayed Moses' teaching, but only in a veiled, "mystical" way. This tradition, also found in Tatian's *Oratio ad Graecos* [31], ultimately comes from Alexandrian Jewish thinkers such as Aristobulus Iudaeus and Philo. It would later be picked up in by patristic writers.

Almost a century after Clement, the main exponent of this pattern of thought in the fourth century would be Eusebius of Caesarea, the most important ancient Christian historiographer and the semi-official representative of Constantine's new imperial theology.[32] This is true, in particular, in his monumental anthology, the *Praeparatio evangelica*. Eusebius devotes the whole eighth book to the question of Mosaic religious polity. Most of the evidence collected by Eusebius comes from Hellenistic Jewish literature, the *Letter* of Aristeas, Philo, and Josephus.

Moreover, the figure of Moses plays a central role in the *Life of Constantine*, a fact that has been recognized, but not fully analyzed. For Eusebius, Moses is the most obvious figure to whom the new emperor can be compared.[33] As Averil Cameron and Stuart Hall note in the introduction to their translation of the text, "a key element in Eusebius' thought is the idea of *mimesis*, whereby the Christian ruler and his Empire are held to mirror or imitate God in heaven," adding that Eusebius's "most obvious device in order to bring home his ideological message [i.e., his political theology of empire] is the patterning of Constantine on Moses."[34] Cameron and Hall emphasize "the deliberateness of the sustained Moses image" without really explaining it. Moses is not only a prophet, not only a bringer of culture and learning, as well as of piety, not only a persecutor of tyrants.

One may ask with them why Eusebius patterned Constantine upon Moses rather than, say, David or Solomon.[35] The answer to this question seems to me to lie in the recognition of the figure of Moses as a *lawgiver*. Better than any other Old Testament figure, Moses can express the political theology of Eusebius, which justifies the new unity of religion and empire. There is no doubt that his perception of Moses as a political leader comes straight from Clement. Eusebius, who was in many ways a follower of Origen, also retained a deep respect for Clement, whose works he knew well.[36]

What should be underlined here is the fact that this perception of Moses, emphasizing his political as well as his religious leadership, or more precisely recognizing the close interdependence of these two dimensions of the prophetic figure, would more or less disappear after Eusebius. This fact offers new support for the thesis of Erik Peterson, who had noted the disappearance of the ancient idea of God's monarchy, and hence of political theology, after Eusebius. What Hegel called "the cunning of reason" (*die List der Vernunft*) seems to have been at work here. It is thanks to a conception of the essentially political dimension of religion, inherited from the ancient world, and which would eventually be picked up by early Islam, that Eusebius was able to offer a theological justification for the new frame of the relationship between religion and politics in Constantine's empire. Such a justification, one should note, would not be needed anymore afterwards.

If Eusebius had been the last exponent of the old conception of civil religion, Augustine would usher in the new approach which permitted the creation of new structures between religion and politics.[37] The perception of the figure of Moses reflects that reinterpretation of civil religion in patristic thought, or, more precisely, the attempt to build a new, Christian, civil religion. The eventual relationship between religious and political authority would be formulated in very different terms in Byzantium and in the West.

Another study, in depth, and of much larger dimensions, would be required in order to assess the dramatic implications of this fact, both in the East and in the West.[38] "Cesaropapism" took rather different forms in Byzantium and in the Latin Middle Ages. But, in both cases, the political dimensions of religion remained colored by ambivalence. Throughout the centuries, Christian thought would never fully outgrew either the deep

suspicion towards the political world nor the essential chasm between spiritual and political power which had been expressed both in the New Testament and in its earliest history, as a *religio illicita* in the Roman Empire. What is already clear, however, is that the figure of Moses as perceived by Philo, at once a religious and a political *nomothetēs*, lawgiver, remained present in the seventh century, a presence amply reflected in the Qur'an.

[1] For recent summary studies of the concept of theocracy, see B. Lang, "Theokratie," in *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*, vol. 5 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2001), pp. 178–89 (with bibliography). See further R. H. Golzio, "Theokratie," in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 8 (Leiden: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), pp. 250–1 (with bibliography).

[2] See for instance Rémi Brague, *La Loi de Dieu: Histoire philosophique d'une alliance* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), pp. 52–4. Brague summarizes the different approaches of Christianity and Islam by pointing out, in his words, that Christianity conquered the state by way of civil society, while Islam conquered civil society by way of the state.

[3] On the political aspirations of monotheism in late antiquity, see Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[4] On Josephus and theocracy, see Hubert Cancik, "Theokratie und Priesterherrschaft: Die mosaische Verfassung bei Flavius Josephus, contra Apionem 2, 157–198," in his *Religionsgeschichten: Römer, Juden und Christen im römischen Reich* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), pp. 193–208. See further Y. Amir, "Theokratia as a Concept of Political Philosophy: Josephus' Presentation of Moses' Politeia," *Studia Classica Israelica* 8–9 (1985), 83–105, as well as Christine Gerber, *Ein Bild des Judentums für Nichtjuden von Flavius Josephus: Untersuchungen zu seiner Schrift Contra Apionem* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1997), pp. 338–59.

[5] A valiant collective effort has been recently made to rescue Jewish political thought from the classical rabbinic sources. Its results, however, are not quite convincing. See *The Jewish Political Tradition*, vol. 1: *Authority*, ed. Michael Walzer and others (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000). On Josephus, see pp. 189–95.

[6] On this concept, see Hans G. Kippenberg, *Die vorderasiatischen Erlösungsreligionen in ihrem Zusammenhang mit der antiken Stadtherrschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), pp. 85–102.

[7] For a recent synthetic study, see Francis Oakley, *Empty Bottles of Gentilism: Kingship and the Divine in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (to 1050)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

[8] Hence the Gnostic avoidance of martyrdom. See Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992).

[9] Speratus dixit: Ego imperium huius seculi non cognosco; sed magis illi Deo seruio quem nemo hominum uidit nec uidere his oculis potest. Furtum non feci, sed si quid emero teloneum reddo quia cognosco domnum meum, imperatorem regum et omnium gentium. In *Passio Sanctorum Scillitanorum*, 6; Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press,

1972), pp. 86–7. Cf. Lester L. Field, *Liberty, Dominion, and the Two Swords: On the Origins of Western Political Theology (180–398)* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998).

[10] Polymnia Athanassiadi, *Vers la pensée unique: La montée de l'intolérance dans l'Antiquité tardive* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2010), p. 72.

[11] Christian Julien Robin has devoted a number of important studies to monotheism in pre-Islamic Arabia. See in particular his "Himyar: Des inscriptions aux traditions," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 30 (2005), 1–51.

[12] See A. Fürst, "Monotheismus und Monarchie: Zum Zusammenhang von Heil und Herrschaft in der Antike," *Theologie und Philosophie* 81 (2006), 321–38.

[13] On the Byzantine conception of theocracy, see Gilbert Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre: Étude sur le césaropapisme byzantin* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), esp. ch. 9. On Dagron's book, see Évelyne Patlagean, "Byzance et la question du roi-prêtre," *Annales HSS* 4 (2000), 871–8.

[14] Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 11–16.

[15] Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 45–6.

[16] Crone, *God's Rule:*, p. 15.

[17] See Aziz Al-Azmeh, "Monotheistic Monarchy," in *The Times of History: Universal Topics in Islamic Historiography* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007), pp. 267–89, esp. p. 271, where Al-Azmeh refers to "the generally smooth transition from pagan to monotheistic sacral kingship." See further his *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian and Pagan Polities* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 1997).

[18] See for instance Paul Casanova, *Mohammed et la fin du monde: Étude critique sur l'Islam primitif* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1911).

[19] Philip Wood, *"We Have No King but Christ": Christian Political Thought in Greater Syria on the Eve of the Arab Conquest (c.400–585)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 12. I wish to thank Philip Wood for having made the manuscript of his book available to me ahead of publication.

[20] Évelyne Patlagean, "Théologie politique de Byzance: L'empereur, le Christ, le patriarche," in *Teologie politiche: Modelli a confronto*, ed. Giovanni Filoramo (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005), pp. 149–61.

[21] See L. Perrone, "Die 'Verfassung der Juden': Das biblische Judentum als politisches Modell in Origenes' *Contra Celsum*," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 7 (2003), 310–28. See further Claudia Rapp, "Old Testament Models for Emperors in Early Byzantium," in *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, ed. Paul Magdalino and Robert S. Nelson (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 175–97.

[22] This is the approach, for instance, of Francis Dvornik's classic *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy: Origins and Background.* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1966).

[23] Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957).

[24] Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre*, ch. 10. See further Marco Rizzi, *Cesare e Dio: Potere spirituale e potere secolare in Occidente* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009).

[25] See S. Fletcher Harding, " Christ as Greater than Moses in Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* I–II," *Studia Patristica* 31 (1997), 397–400. Cf. S. Fletcher Harding, "Moses and Jesus in *Contra Celsum* 7.1–25: Ethics, History and Jewish-Christian Eirenics in Origen's Theology," in *Origen of Alexandria: His World and His Legacy*, ed. Charles Kannengiesser and William Lawrence Petersen (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), pp. 313–36. For other examples of Christ as *nomothetēs*, see Geoffrey William Hugo Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 919 B ff. See further Perrone, "Die 'Verfassung der Juden'". The following paragraphs are taken, with some changes, from Guy G. Stroumsa, "Moses the Lawgiver and the Idea of Civil Religion in Patristic Thought," in *Teologie politiche: Modelli a confronto*, ed. Giovanni Filoramo (Bologna: Morcelliana, 2005), pp. 135–48.

[26] *Strom.* I.26.

[27] *Strom*. I.14.

[28] In the present context, a case of special interest is provided by the figure of Numa. Numa Pompilius, the mythical first king of Rome, had been a paradigmatic figure in Roman and Hellenistic historiography. In the first century BCE, in particular, Varro had devoted much attention to him, as the true creator of Roman religion and of its relationship with the state. Clement espoused this tradition, which he sought to reinterpret from his own peculiar viewpoint: for him, Numa was a Pythagorean philosopher, who was strongly influenced by Mosaic conceptions. See Guy G. Stroumsa, "Cultural Memory in Early Christianity: Clement of Alexandria and the History of Religions," in *Axial Civilizations and World History*, ed. Jóhann Páll Árnason, S. N. Eisenstadt, and Björn Wittrock, Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture, 4 (Leiden and Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2004), pp. 293–315. See further Mark Silk, "Numa Pompilius and the Development of the Idea of Civil Religion in Western Thought," in *Teologie politiche: Modelli a confronto*, ed. Giovanni Filoramo (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005), pp. 335–56.

[29] See R. Mortley, "The Past in Clement of Alexandria," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, ed. E. P. Sanders, vol. 1 (London: SCM Press, 1980), pp. 186–200.

[30] See Pseudo-Justinus, *Cohortatio Ad Graecos, De Monarchia, Oratio Ad Graecos*, ed. Miroslav Marcovich, Patristische Texte und Studien, 32 (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1990) esp. chs 14–34: Orpheus, Homer, and Plato sometimes reveal true religion, since they had come into contact with the teachings of Moses in Egypt. Plato was afraid to proclaim this openly because of his fear of the Athenians and what they had done to Socrates; *Ad Graecos de vera religione (bisher "Cohortatio ad Graecos")*, ed. Christoph Riedweg (Basle: F. Reinhardt, 1994). See further Daniel Ridings, *The Attic Moses: The Dependency Theme in Some Early Christian Writers* (Gothenburg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1995), pp. 231–8. Cf. the new edition of the Pseudo-Justinian corpus in *Ouvrages apologétiques*, ed. Bernard Pouderon, Sources Chrétiennes, 528 (Paris: Cerf, 2009).

[31] 40.1; 41.1–2.

[32] See in particular Pierre Maraval, *Eusèbe de Césarée: La théologie politique de l'empire chrétien. Louanges de Constantin (triakontaétérikos)* (Paris: Cerf, 2001).

[33] See M. J. Hollerich, "The Comparison of Moses and Constantine in Eusebius of Caesarea's *Life of Constantine*," *Studia Patristica* 19 (1989), 80–95. See further T. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 271. Barnes notes that in his conception of the Laws of Moses (as in much else), Eusebius follows Origen. A similar viewpoint can be found in Garth Fowden, "Religious Communities," in *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Post Classical World*, ed. G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 91. See further Claudia Rapp, "Imperial Ideology in the Making:

Eusebius of Caesarea on Constantine as 'Bishop'," *Journal of Theological Studies* 49 (1998), 685–95, as well as Claudia Rapp, "Comparison, Paradigm, and the Case of Moses," in *Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, ed. M. Whitby (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 277–98 (*non vidi*)). The figure of Moses would remain central in representations of the Byzantine emperor, from Theodosius II to Justinian; see Sabine MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p. 231 and n. 333, p. 365.

34 Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, ed. Averil Cameron and Stuart Hall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), pp. 35–7.

35 Byzantine emperors would later be patterned upon these Hebrew kings. See Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre*.

36 On Eusebius' knowledge and use of Clement, see J. Coman, "Utilisation des *Stromates* de Clément d'Alexandrie par Eusèbe de Césarée dans la *Préparation évangélique*," in *Überlieferungsgeschichtlische Untersuchungen*, ed. Franz Paschke (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1981), pp. 115–34. Cf. J. Edgar Bruns, "The 'Agreement of Moses and Jesus' in the *Demonstratio evangelica* of Eusebius," *Vigiliae Christianae* 31 (1977), 117–25.

37 In the modern era, new trends in European political thought insist upon Moses' political leadership. See for instance John H. Geerken, "Machiavelli's Moses and Renaissance Politics," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60 (1999), 579–95.

38 See Field, *Liberty, Dominion, and the Two Swords*.

Part IV

The Way to Mecca

Jewish-Christians and Islamic Origins

Part III of this book dealt with the interactions between competing monotheistic communities, and ended with the ambivalence of Christianity toward the political dimensions of religion. As is well known, Islam would develop, from the start, a much simpler and more direct attitude toward political power. In Part IV, we shall discuss some of the roots of Islam in the milieu of late ancient monotheistic communities. One of the more puzzling dimensions of these roots is reflected in some striking similarities between a few essential traits of early Islam and Jewish-Christian theological concepts and attitudes. It is to these similarities that the present chapter is devoted.

I

It is to the Irish freethinker John Toland (1668–1722) that we owe the concept of Jewish-(or Judaeo-)Christianity. In 1718, Toland published, in London, *Nazarenus, or Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity*. This text further developed ideas first presented in his French manuscript written in 1710, *Christianisme judaïque et mahométan*, which sought to offer a historical argument, recognizing the Jewish roots of Christianity in order to promote the toleration of Jews in modern European societies.[1]

Toland based his argument upon the *Gospel of Barnabas*, an apocryphal writing of unknown date, the full text of which we only possess in an Italian version of a lost Spanish one. This text announces the coming of Muhammad and makes reference to the *shahāda*, the Muslim profession of faith. According to the *Gospel of Barnabas*, Jesus is a prophet, not the Son of God, and does not die on the cross. In his stead, it is Judas Iscariot who is crucified.[2] A human, rather than a divine Jesus, and a Docetist conception of the Passion: these traits are typical of the figure of Jesus both for Jewish-Christians and in the Qur'an. For Toland, some of the fundamental doctrines of Islam are rooted in the "most ancient monuments of the Christian religion," and not in the views of the Nestorian monk Sergius.[3] It is to Toland's refutation by the Lutheran orthodox theologian Lorenz von Mosheim (1693–1755), *Vindiciae antiquae christianiorum disciplinae*, published in 1720, that Toland's book owed its fame and the concept of Jewish-Christianity its survival. Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860), the founder of the Tübingen school of New Testament studies, made *Judenchristentum* a cornerstone of his conception of Christian origins. For the Hegelian that he was, second-century Christianity represented the synthesis or sublimation (*Aufhebung*) of Petrine Christianity and Paulinian ("gentile") Christianity. For most historians of early Christianity, it is Baur, rather than Toland, who is at the origin of the concept of Jewish-Christianity, a phenomenon that would be studied, from Baur on, only in the first Christian centuries. Toland's intuition, according to which one of the earliest manifestations of Christianity, having survived late antiquity, had a major impact upon the earliest stages of Islam, and hence on the world history of religions, practically disappeared from the horizon of research.

The patristic sources do not speak, of course, of "Jewish-Christianity." From the second to the fourth centuries, the patristic heresiographers usually mention the Ebionites (*ebionitoi*), whose name was thought to have come from their imaginary founder, a certain Ebion. In fact, it comes from their insistence upon the spiritual value of poverty: they call themselves *evvyonim* ("poor" in Hebrew), a biblical term they borrowed from Psalms. The Christian heresiographers also mention other names of sects, in particular those of the Nazoreans (*nazoraioi*), who share, at least partly, Ebionite ideas. For the Nazoreans, Jesus was, rather than God's Son, a prophet, the last of a long chain of true prophets, starting with Adam, in which each true prophet is preceded by a false prophet. Moreover, Jesus had not died on the cross; the heresiographers often associate this Docetism with other doctrines of Jewish-Christian groups.[4]

Historiographic revisionism is fashionable today. One often questions the usefulness of some of our concepts, such as Gnosticism, for a better understanding of historical realities. Thus, for example, Daniel Boyarin has expressed serious doubts concerning the possibility of speaking of "Judaism" (*Ioudaismos*) before the fourth century CE. For him, Jewish beliefs and practices are defined as such by patristic theologians. In consequence, rather than reflecting historical reality, they reveal more about those using them.[5] And since Boyarin believes that the concept of "Judaism" is not valid in this period, he also proposes to abandon the concept of Jewish-Christianity, without suggesting a clear alternative. But a historical phenomenon needs to be named if one is to study it.

Methodological remarks are always necessary and often useful. In the present case, however, I fail to see what one gains by replacing one concept with another. This is not the place for examining or refuting Boyarin's approach. Suffice it here to say that, in any domain, research demands an intellectual effort to identify common denominators of various phenomena (for instance, multiple religious sects and groups). Such common denominators allow us to retrace central trends underlying the complexity of observable reality. One cannot fulfill this task without creating categories, the primary justification of which is their heuristic usefulness. Gnosticism and Jewish-Christianity are examples of such categories, which cannot be abandoned, although they must be used with care, without forgetting what they are not: a truthful representation of historical reality. In particular, these categories do not reflect clearly identifiable groups. Thus, it

is often among Jewish-Christians (or in Jewish-Christian texts or traditions) that we can find some easily identifiable Gnostic theologoumena, such as Docetism.[6]

By Jewish-Christianity, I mean the faith of Jews who believed that Jesus was the Messiah announced by the prophets, but did not give up traditional Jewish religious practice. For Origen, in the first half of the third century, these Jewish-Christians, who wished to be at once Jews and Christians, succeeded in being neither Jews nor Christians. One should note that the Jewish sources are singularly less prolix than the Christian ones: for the rabbis, the best way of dealing with their enemies was to "kill them by silence." Contemporary scholars thus rely on the perception of the patristic sources, for which these archaic heretics had practically disappeared before the end of the fourth century. Consequently, most contemporary scholars treat the existence of Jewish-Christian communities beyond the first centuries with deep skepticism.[7]

And yet, the Jewish-Christians of antiquity (who are unrelated to the contemporary "Jews for Jesus," whose theology is that of evangelical Christianity) do not seem to have disappeared from the late antique scene. The sources (or at least the reliable ones) are quite scarce and hard to interpret. Another method, then, is needed in order to detect the presence of Jewish-Christians. In particular, one should at once use common sense and offer a careful interpretation of indirect sources. To be sure, late antique Jewish-Christian communities must have been small, marginal groups, often living in a protected isolation. As far as I know, there is no clear-cut and irrefutable proof of their existence in the seventh century. But the traces they left provide enough circumstantial evidence to let us assume their continued existence long after the end of the fourth century (when Epiphanius and Jerome testify unambiguously to their presence) and their *Fortleben*. John of Damascus mentions, in the early eighth century, the existence "to this day" of a Jewish-Christian Elchasaite group, the Sampseans, on the shores of the Dead Sea.[8] His testimony is usually rejected by scholars, as he repeats what Epiphanius of Salamis had written in the fourth century. And yet, one must remember that John writes from the monastery of Mar Saba, in the Judean wilderness, a place very close to the Dead Sea (a few kilometers as the crow flies). It is improbable that John's mention of heretics living on the shores of the Dead Sea does not refer to a concrete reality. The very late existence of such groups, however, is less

striking than the impact they may have had far beyond their own boundaries.

Among the various theories on the origins of Islam, those involving the Jewish-Christians seem fashionable today. This may be a bit puzzling since Toland's *Nazarenus* was for all practical purposes forgotten long ago. It is the liberal theologian and great historian of early Christianity Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) who seems to be at the origin of the present trend of thought. In a few pages of his *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, he had proposed identifying in some Jewish-Christian theologoumena some of the most important sources of earliest Islam.[9] Harnack, who had no particular interest in Islam, concurred with Toland through his intuition on the similarity between prophecy and Docetism in the Qur'an (Q. 4.157) and among the Ebionites. To these remarks of Harnack one should add those of Ernest Renan and Daniel Chwolson, in two studies published in the mid-nineteenth century, to which we shall return below.[10] Thus, a number of Baptist and Jewish-Christian sects from the first centuries were brought to bear upon the study of Islamic origins.

Over the years, Harnack's intuition regarding Jewish-Christian origins was picked up and developed by a number of scholars—first by the New Testament scholar Adolf Schlatter and then, in particular, by Hans-Joachim Schoeps, the great specialist in Jewish-Christianity in the early centuries.[11] The most serious difficulty of this thesis on the Jewish-Christian impact on the Qur'an, however, remained the fact that our documentation on Jewish-Christian communities rarely goes beyond the fourth century. With no chronological and geographical proximity, the structural similarities between Jewish-Christian theology and some Qur'anic verses remained parallelisms, certainly interesting from a phenomenological viewpoint, but useless for explaining the transmission of these theologoumena to the Qur'an. Thanks to a series of discoveries and studies, our knowledge of the early Jewish-Christians has now become more precise. We now know that some Jewish-Christian communities may have survived, at least in Palestine, until the Muslim conquests.[12] It is certainly not far-fetched to imagine a possible Jewish-Christian presence in late antique Hijaz.

Rather than offering a new theory, I should like to offer here a *status quaestionis*, adding some methodological and epistemological reflections on the way in which the question is framed today for the historian of late

antique religion. Obviously, I make no claims here on the redaction of the Qur’an or the formation of Islam, but deal only with aspects of the religious background of the Qur’an. As in the case of Christianity or Manichaeism, Islam permits us to observe how a religion is born, although we know infinitely more about the birth of Christianity than about that of Islam.

II

For almost two centuries now research on Islamic origins seems to oscillate between two main options. In 1833, the young Abraham Geiger published his monograph on Muhammad's Jewish sources, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* Geiger insisted on Midrashic traditions, the traces of which can be discovered in various sūras. Geiger's central idea, the deep impact of some Jewish traditions on the Qur'an, was generally accepted by Orientalists. This acceptance stands in stark contradistinction to his perception of Jesus as having been close to the Pharisees, an idea which all Christian theologians rejected with deep horror (one of them, the Hebraist Franz Delitzsch, wrote that calling Jesus a Pharisee was "ten times worse" than the crucifixion). A long list of (usually Jewish) scholars familiar with rabbinic literature has pursued research following in Geiger's footsteps. It is mainly thanks to the great Orientalist Theodor Nöldeke (who was very impressed by Geiger's book) that research looked for the Christian sources of Islam. For Nöldeke, Islam actually represented the Arabic form of Christianity. The learned Swedish bishop Tor Andræ would pursue Nöldeke's research, insisting on the fact that the Christian orthodox traditions are not the only sources reflecting the Qur'an's background and that one should not forget Jewish-Christianity (or Manichaeism, for that matter) as possible roots of Qur'anic doctrines. Such an approach is still favored today by scholars such as Günter Lüling or Christoph Luxenberg, for whom the source of the Qur'an (the *Ur-Koran*) is to be found in Syriac Christian hymns (Arian for Lüling).[13] Research still does not seem to have àreally rephrased the problem and continues to oscillate between Judaism and Christianity in order to understand the birth of Islam better.[14]

In 614 the Byzantine Empire had suffered a humiliating defeat by the Sasanians. Yet, this was only the foretaste of the amputation of much of its territory a few decades later with the Islamic conquests. Tensions ran high and the heightened expectation of the *Endzeit* encouraged a renewal of an apocalyptic mode of thought.[15] Eschatological *furore* was as alive among the Jewish communities as among the Christian populations. For the Jews, however, the interpretation of coming events was strictly the opposite of

that of the Christians: the Antichrist, with the violent tribulations expected by the Christians (before Christ's return in glory), was the Jews' Messiah.[16] For both Jews and Christians, the eschatological expectations were anchored in a long tradition, but this tradition had become blurred or neutralized in the course of the centuries (for Christians, mainly since the Constantinian revolution). And yet, eschatological expectations had never quite disappeared. Rather, they had become an underground stream, ready to reappear in times of dramatic events.

The conquest of Jerusalem and the capture of the Holy Cross in 614, which represented for the Byzantines a true military, political, and religious catastrophe, were perceived by Jews as a messianic promise.[17] We have learned to recognize the centrality of Jerusalem for the earliest stages of Islam. Some indications suggest that the military defeat of the Byzantines and the Muslim conquest of the Holy City were perceived by the Jews as signs that the messiah and the end of times were near. For the Jews, the Muslim conquerors could have appeared as announcing the Messiah. Indeed, it seems that the early architectural activity of the new masters of the Temple Mount—for them, *al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf*—was interpreted by Jews as announcing the coming of the *Endzeit*. It might even have been perceived in that way by the Muslims themselves, as suggested by Andreas Kaplony, in his detailed study of the Islamic sources.[18]

In the last generation, and in particular since the publication of Peter Brown's *The World of Late Antiquity* in 1971, late antiquity is no longer defined only by the joint presence of pagans and Christians in the Roman world. In a number of aspects, the Islamic conquests retained the cultural traditions of the Roman Empire. In addition, Greek remained the administrative language under the early Ummayads. Hence, historians now commonly agree that late antiquity continues at least until the end of the Umayyad period.

In parallel to the extension of the chronological limits of late antiquity, we can witness today the extension of its geographical boundaries. In particular, we have learned to recognize that the Arabian Peninsula, considered earlier to have been located on the margins of the *oikoumenē* and to have played a rather limited historical and cultural role, must now be seen as an integral part of the world of late antiquity. This is particularly true, in our present context, in the realm of religious ideas and practices. Robert Hoyland, who has significantly contributed to a better knowledge of

the complex religious milieu of earliest Islam, has referred to late antique Arabia as a "laboratory" for observing the transformation of religious traditions, the end of paganism, and the birth of Islam.[19]

In order to understand in what sense Arabia can be called a laboratory for religious change, one can refer to Max Weber. For Weber, it was not by chance that the prophets of Israel belonged to a marginal society, outside the main political, economic, and cultural centers of the ancient Near East. For him, it was precisely the relative distance from those centers that made possible fruitful exchanges between periphery and center, as well as the birth of new forms of cultural and religious expression. According to Weber, the creative tension permitting the birth of such new forms demands some distance between two societies, one of which is to an extent dependent upon the other. This distance, however, should not be too great, lest it prevent cultural communication.[20] *Mutatis mutandis*, late antique Arabia is like ancient Israel: in permanent contact with the great political centers of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East, as well as with the religious trends throughout the region.[21] From the 570s and the Sasanian conquest of Yemen, Arabia was practically surrounded by the Persians. Under such conditions, the slow but clear religious evolution at work since Hellenistic times, from polytheism to monotheism, had a powerful impact upon the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula.

We now know that at the end of the sixth century Arabia had become, as it were, a major meeting place in the Near East, between the Sasanian and the Byzantine empires as well as Axum's Christian kingdom.[22] In Arabia, monks, dissidents, missionaries, soldiers, refugees, and merchants, all facilitated, inter alia, the free circulation of religious ideas.[23] From the last years of the sixth century, Arabia absorbed the repercussions of the conflict between the two empires.[24] It is probably in the context of the eschatological tensions mentioned on p. 145 above that one should understand what Christian Robin has called the "prophetic movement" in early seventh-century Arabia. As Robin has also noted, new epigraphic discoveries reflect the religious crisis long undermining traditional beliefs in Arabia.[25] Many opted for a form of monotheism, but the precise nature of this monotheism escapes us, although it seems to have followed "Jewish" patterns. Iwona Gadja has been able to show how a similar kind of

monotheism developed in Ḥimyar, in the cracks as it were, between Judaism and Christianity as their believers vied for power.[26]

Our knowledge of the presence of Jewish and Christian communities in Hijaz, in Western Arabia, is very limited. There are no remaining imprints of Christian communities north of Yemen. François Villeneuve writes that in Arabia Christianity never succeeded in getting a foothold south of Aqaba.[27] Moreover, the testimonies regarding the existence of Jewish tribes in Ḥijāz do not enlighten us on the nature of their Judaism, although some clues would point to Jews coming from Palestine.[28] Even if one can detect the impact on earliest Islam of some ideas originating in the Sasanian realm,[29] the Qur'an clearly points to the fact that the main religious trends underlying Islamic monotheism come from Jewish and Christian milieus.

Reading the Qur'an in the light of late antique literature, as Angela Neuwirth proposes, is meaningful only if it is made clear that what is meant is Jewish or Christian late antique texts.[30] Classical *paideia* and the Greek philosophical tradition, which are of crucial importance in late antiquity, will have a major impact on Islamic culture, but only later, in Abbasid Baghdad. Even if limited to its Jewish and Christian expressions, however, late antique culture in the Near East offered a rich gamut of exegetical possibilities. All sectarian and hermeneutical trends stemming from the foundational texts of Jews and Christians must therefore be studied together. These include not only the various Jewish-Christian groups as mentioned by the Christian heresiologists, such as the Ebionites, the Nazoreans, or the Elchasaites, but also Gnostic and Manichaean dualists and also the "noble" heresies of the Monophysites and Nestorians, who together represent the majority of late antique Christians in the Near East, from Egypt and Syria to Armenia and Iran.

In 1978, John Wansbrough published *The Sectarian Milieu*, a book in which he sought to identify, beyond the multiple communities in Arabia at the dawn of Islam, a conflict of hermeneutics and even a midrashic mythopoiesis, within which one should study the formation of the Qur'an.[31] Wansbrough's approach had a powerful impact upon Patricia Crone, one of the two co-authors of *Hagarism*, a book published the preceding year.[32] *Hagarism* offers a fresh approach to Islamic origins, and establishes its argument solely on seventh-century sources, that is, mainly on Christian texts, while ignoring Islamic (Arabic) sources, all later, unless corroborated

by other sources. To be sure, the reconstruction of Islamic origins thus obtained remains speculative, as the two authors willingly admit. Such a revisionist attitude, however, permits us to formulate anew the problem of Islamic origins within the frame of biblical hermeneutics among Jews and Christians.

III

The scholarly oscillation mentioned in Section II, p. 144 above between emphasizing either the Jewish or the Christian roots of Islam (and, of course, the various movements between these two main traditions) stems, I think, from an error of method. It is a mistake to choose between a number of options (postulated to be exclusive of one another) in order to identify the roots of theological ideas in earliest Islam. There is no reason to think that in a religious, cultural, and political milieu as complex as that of the sixth- and seventh-century Near East, Islam would have originated from a single source. Moreover, categories which propose a taxonomy of religious ideas tend to freeze them, suppressing their dynamism, erasing their free circulation and their constant restructuration in new forms.

In a world endowed with a great social and religious complexity, the constant interaction and transformation of ideas and persons is the default option, as it were, and permanent fluidity is the essential rule. This is how one should conceive the interface between religious traditions in the Near East, an interface in which Islam was born. One should insist on the flow of religious ideas between communities. The formation of Islam and its early conquests restructured religious communities in the Near East and permitted the stabilization of both religious ideas and boundaries between communities. Referring to the transmission of ideas between religious communities in the Arabic Middle Ages, Sarah Stroumsa has spoken of a "whirlpool effect," as it is usually impossible to specify the origin of each specific element.[33]

All this leads to what I propose to call the "principle of non-exclusivity." I prefer to speak of communities rather than of sects, as this last term entails deviance vis-à-vis an orthodoxy, the existence of which cannot always be demonstrated.[34] Proper method demands that we do not identify a source as the sole origin of Qur'anic terms or formulas, to the exclusion of other possible filiations. At the same time, the "principle of non-exclusivity" is also a principle of indetermination. In a world in which religious ideas circulate freely and transform themselves constantly, it is almost impossible to determine the precise origin of these ideas or the proximate channels through which they reached the Qur'an.

Arguments highlighting the similarity between various Jewish-Christian concepts and some Qur'anic passages receive their full value only in a discourse insisting upon the plurality of the sources of earliest Islam. According to a number of Christian traditions, the Prophet had met a heretical monk who taught him certain Christian doctrines (in a perverse way, of course). As early as 1858, Nöldeke had raised the question of Muḥammad's Christian teachers.[35] For him, however, the Arab "priest" Waraka was a Jew rather than a Christian. In later Arabic sources, Waraka is deemed to have been "a bishop from the Naṣārā" who "belonged to the Prophet's family." Although *naṣārā* usually refers to Christians, the term may also indicate the *nazoraioi*, one of the Jewish-Christian sects according to Patristic heresiologists.[36]

Concluding his analysis of the *naṣārā/nazoraioi* case, the New Testament scholar Joachim Gnilka notes the striking theological proximity between the Qur'an and Jewish-Christian traditions.[37] Like other scholars before him, he calls attention to the similarity between Sūra 19 (*sūrat Mariam*, which deals with Zechariah and the birth of John the Baptist) and the *Protoevangelium of James*. One must recognize that Gnilka's results are slightly disappointing, as he remains unable to explain the ways through which these Jewish-Christian concepts may have reached early seventh-century Ḥijāz.

Following Hans-Joachim Schoeps, Martiniano Pellegrino Roncaglia develops Harnack's thesis on the Jewish-Christian origins of Islam, in reference to the traditions concerning Waraka. For Roncaglia, as for the great German scholar of early Christianity, Islam represents the transformation on Arabic soil of what he calls "Gnostic Jewish-Christianity." Roncaglia notes that the Islamic prohibition on wine seems to be "Elchasaite." To the best of my knowledge, no extant source mentions the prohibition on wine among the Elchasaites, although, according to Irenaeus, the Ebionites abstain from wine.[38] For Roncaglia, moreover, the Jewish-Christian idea of the true prophet lies at the root of the Islamic conception of prophecy. He also points out the similarity between the Ebionite conception of a diabolical falsification of Scripture and the Islamic concept of *taḥrīf*, that is, the falsification of their revealed Scripture by Jews and Christians.[39]

For Roncaglia, then, Ebionites and Elchasaites are identical. Such an identification, however, is not based on the sources, and nothing points to an Elchasaite presence in Ḥijāz. The origin of this identification seems to go back to Renan, for whom the Qur'an's Sabaeans were Elchasaites and Mandaeans, and to Chwolson, who, in his great monograph on the Sabaeans, had detected some Manichaean elements in Islam.[40] The Baptist group within which Mani had grown up, in North Mesopotamia of the early third century, had been called *mughtasila* (Baptists) by the tenth-century Islamic bibliographer Ibn al-Nadīm. These *mughtasila* seem to have had many affinities with the Elchasaites as the Christian heresiologists present them. The final proof of the identity between the two groups was made by the publication, in 1975, of the Cologne Mani Codex, an ancient biography of the Prophet of Light, found in a Greek version. This text preserves for us precious details on the Elchasaites as Mani had known them in his childhood and youth.[41]

The discovery of the Cologne Mani Codex has triggered renewed reflection on some remarkable parallels between Manichaeism and Islam. Robert Simon, who studied these parallels, has noted that one might have overstressed Judaism and Christianity as possible sources of Islam and that the Manichaean track has almost not been followed.[42] Simon calls attention to both the universal character of these two religions, from the time of their birth, and their shared conception of holy books. The most striking similarity concerns the notion of the "seal of prophecy." This notion, which is fundamental for the Qur'anic idea of prophecy, can already be found in Manichaeism, as I have argued in Chapter 5. It originates in the Jewish-Christian roots of the Religion of Light. As noted by Simon, both Mani and Muhammad perceive their prophetic role as being at once the summit and the conclusion of a long chain of prophets, from Adam to Jesus. The Manichaeans, for whom proselytizing was an essential religious duty, had moved to the north-east of the Arabian Peninsula. Simon also postulates the arrival of the Manichaeans in Mecca, along with the Lakhmids, after the collapse of the kingdom of Ḥimyar following the Abyssinian conquest.[43] One should note with Patricia Crone, however, that there is no trace of Manichaeism in the Qur'an itself.

In three important articles, published between 1995 and 2004, François de Blois has made significant contributions to research on the Sabaeans in

pre-Islamic Arabia, as well as on the terms *naṣrānī* (according to him an Arabic translation of *nazoraios*) and *hanīf* in the Qur'an, and finally on the comparison between Manichaeism and Islam.[44] In the first of these articles, de Blois argues that the religious milieu in which Islam emerged included at least five religions: Arab paganism, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Manichaeism. Following the Maronite scholar Abraham Ecchellensis in 1660, Ernest Renan and Daniel Chwolson proposed in the nineteenth century, as we saw in Section I, p. 143 above, that the Qur'an's Sabaeans be identified with the Mandaeans. De Blois notes that there is no trace of a hypothetical Mandaean presence in seventh-century Arabia.

In his article on *Naṣrānī* and *ḥanīf*, de Blois first argues that in the Qur'an, *naṣārā* indicates Nazorean Jewish-Christians, rather than Christians. He then discusses the meaning of *ḥanīf*, a puzzling term of Aramaic origin. The Syriac equivalent is quite negative, as it refers to paganism, in contradistinction to the meaning of the term in the Qur'an, where a *ḥanīf* is a believer in the true religion of Abraham. According to de Blois, the Qur'anic conception of the *ḥanīf* reflects a polemic against the Nazoreans, a fact which proves the presence of a Jewish-Christian community in seventh-century Arabia.

In "Elchasai—Manes—Muḥammad: Manichäismus und Islam in religionshistorischem Vergleich," de Blois first offers a synthesis of the results of his investigations so far. Going further, he seeks to explain the remarkable parallels between those two syncretistic religions, Manichaeism and Islam. For him, these parallels, in particular those associated with the idea of prophecy in the two religions, come from their joint Jewish-Christian background. De Blois thus proposes to see in the idea of a "seal of prophecy" a Jewish-Christian idea adopted by Muhammad. He concludes by noting that Jewish-Christians find themselves at the very epicenter of the history of religions in the Near East.

The Pseudo-Clementine Homilies offer a major testimony in our quest for Ebionite central theological conceptions, such as the chain of prophecy through the ages. Inter alia, the Pseudo-Clementine writings (both the Latin *Recognitions* and the Greek *Homilies*) develop the idea that some scriptural passages were inserted by Satan and must hence be expurgated from the sacred text.[45] This early Jewish-Christian conception, which was picked up

by Marcion for some of the gospels, will reappear in the (post-Qur'anic) concept of *taḥrīf*.[46]

The latest contribution to our present problem which I should like to mention here is the work in progress by Holger Zellentin, who has discovered in some Qur'anic passages striking parallels with a number of patristic texts, in particular with the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* and the *Didaskalia*, a fourth-century text on ritual and legal precepts, rooted in the *Didachē* (a Jewish-Christian text from the early second century) as well as on Christology and scriptural hermeneutics. Epiphanius, the bishop of Salamis in Cyprus in the fourth century and one of the major heresiologists, who was born in Eleutheropolis (Beit Guvrin), tells us that the *Didaskalia* was read by Audians in Palestine. We know precious little about the Audians, quartodeciman sectarians from Mesopotamia who read apocryphal texts retaining anthropomorphic esoteric traditions on God's body. Henri-Charles Puech, who had been the first to call attention to the Audians, showed that some of their traditions were patently Gnostic. He was unable, however, to identify the probable Jewish origin of their conception of the divine body.[47]

Whatever the case might be, the *Didaskalia* originates in a milieu close to Jewish-Christians, a fact reflected by both its ethics and its conception of ritual purity. Basing his reflections on this closeness, Zellentin believes that the text of the Qur'an "responds" to a specific group of Jewish-Christians in its audience. More precisely, the Qur'an stands, for him, between Jewish-Christians and rabbinic Jews in its legal culture as well as in its approach to ritual practices. Although Zellentin still has to publish much of his recent research, what we already know of it suggests that it will open new horizons and a broadened discussion of Qur'anic origins.[48]

One of the most striking parallels between the Pseudo-Clementine writings and the Qur'an is probably Peter's claim, in the *Homilies*, that "God is one, and there is no God but Him."[49] Although this partial presence of the Qur'anic *shahāda* in an early Jewish-Christian text has already been noticed, it does not seem to have received all the attention it deserves. Other similarities are worth noting, although they do not constitute conclusive evidence, such as for instance the Qur'anic term "believers" (*mu'minūn*). The same word (*pisteuontes* in Greek), indeed, refers in the New Testament (Acts) to Jews who have recognized Jesus as the Messiah without giving up

on the practice of the biblical commandments in their traditional Jewish interpretation. In patristic literature, from Origen to the testimony of Arculf, a Gaulish monk who came to the Holy Land on a pilgrimage in the 680s, *pisteuontes* (or its Latin equivalent, *credentes*) often refers to Jewish-Christians. Arculf, as quoted by Adomnan, mentions the existence in Jerusalem of a community of "believing" Jews, side by side with that of Jews who refuse to recognize Jesus as the Messiah announced by the prophets.[50] Shlomo Pines has proposed seeing in the Qur'anic concept *mu'min*, plur. *mu'minūn* (for instance Qur'an 2:62; 5:69; 22:17), a linguistic calque of the term *pisteuōn* (or *credens*). According to him, "believers" would thus refer in the Qur'an to Jewish-Christians, side by side with Jews, Christians (*naṣārā*), Sabaeans, and Zoroastrians (*majūs*).[51] One should also note that the Qur'anic *mushrikūn* (from *shirk*, association), traditionally perceived as polytheists, are considered by Gerald Hawting and Patricia Crone to have been monotheists.[52]

In a series of articles, published from 1966 to 1987, Pines offered a very powerful argument for the survival of some Jewish-Christian communities until at least early Islam.[53] Sadly, Pines's articles have not had the impact one might have imagined. This is due both to the technical nature of his arguments and to the fact that these publications are not always easy to find. Moreover, the conservative instinct of the scholarly community, to some extent still prisoner of the patristic tradition, has proven unwilling to admit the survival of Jewish-Christian groups after the fourth century.[54] Pines establishes his arguments, first, upon the discovery of new anti-Christian polemical texts in Arabic (and Judeo-Arabic) and in Hebrew. He shows how the understanding of Christianity in these texts reflects a Jewish-Christian rather than an orthodox theology. Pines also point out how some of the concepts in these Arabic texts seem to be calques of terms used to describe Jewish-Christianity by the patristic heresiographers.[55]

In a recent book, Fred Donner develops a controversial thesis on original Islam as an ecumenical movement which included monotheists from various denominations, former pagans, Jews, and Christians, all "believing" in Muhammad's mission without abandoning their original faith and community.[56] According to him, earliest Islam represents an Arab nativist movement rallying around an Abrahamic monotheism, close to both

Judaism and Christianity, whose existence had been ignored by most scholars.

IV

From different angles, the hypothesis can be made of a pre-Islamic Abrahamic trend, that is, one or a few religious groups perceiving themselves as following in the spiritual footsteps of Abraham and practicing the true religion which Abraham had discovered (or established) —a religion perverted by both Jews and Christians, who considered themselves to be his [spiritual] offspring. Such a hypothesis would explain the Qur'anic allusions to "Abraham's religion" (*millat Ibrāhīm*). However, even more than in the case of Jewish-Christians, our sources are here almost totally silent. In his *De Monogamia*, Tertullian, at the turn of the third century, had mentioned the existence of such a group. Sozomen, a fifth-century ecclesiastical historian born in Palestine, describes in a famous passage the annual Abrahamic festival in Mamre, an international and inter-religious fair in which Jews, Christians, as well as "Palestinians, Phoenicians, and Arabs," took part.[57] Sozomen writes elsewhere that the Arabs, having learned from the Jews about their Abrahamic roots, were practicing circumcision and abstaining from eating pork, as well as practicing a number of other Jewish rituals and customs.[58] Sozomen's testimony has, of course, been noted by scholars and, in the last generation, a number of important studies have suggested a possible trajectory of Abrahamic rituals up to the birth of Islam, in particular those related to the Mecca sanctuary.[59]

In late antiquity, Abraham was considered as a "culture hero" beyond the Jewish and Christian communities. For many pagans, his Babylonian origin made him the first astronomer. For both Jews and Christians, as Eusebius pointed out, Abraham was, of course, the first Hebrew patriarch as well as the inventor of true religion (*theosebeia*).[60] Moreover, according to Yehuda Nevo and Judith Koren, in the fifth and sixth centuries some Negev Arabs had been attracted by an "Abrahamic form" of monotheism, which expressed their ethnic identity and, in other words, Arab faith.[61] Nevo and Koren underline the frequent mention of the name Abraham in the Nessana documentary papyri. These late papyri, dating from the sixth and seventh centuries, were redacted in a community of Christian Arabs who, according to Nevo and Koren, may have previously developed an "Abrahamic"

identity. Yet, Abraham is also common as a name in Egyptian papyri of the fifth century, a fact which makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions.[62]

The idea of a late antique Abrahamic religious movement, flourishing especially among the Negev Arabs, is certainly a plausible hypothesis, but not one that can be demonstrated in the present state of our knowledge. Such a movement would have been located on the margins of both Judaism and Christianity, just like Jewish-Christianity. One might also point out the striking importance of Abraham in the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones*, a text according to which Abraham was the first man to cross from ignorance to knowledge.[63]

For a very long time, the Jewish tradition had insisted upon Abraham's versatility. According to Genesis 17: 3–8, Abraham was both the ancestor of Israel and the father of "a multitude of peoples"—and not only the forefather of Ishmael's offspring. According to *Jubilees* (chapter 9), the Mishna (*Kiddushin* 4: 14), and the Babylonian Talmud (*Yoma* 28b), Abraham had followed God's commandments before the promulgation of the Torah. Similarly, according to Philo, Abraham had followed God's ways before Moses had proclaimed the written Law (*agraphos physis*; *De Abrahamo* 275–6). Philo also notes elsewhere (*De virt.* 216) that Abraham was the first man to have believed in God—an idea echoed by Paul (Rom. 4: 1), Philo's contemporary. In the footsteps of Pines and Dominique Urvoy, de Blois argues, as we have seen, that the Qur'anic *ḥanīf*, the Gentile truthful to Abraham's religion, reflects a conception of Abraham as the father of a multitude of nations, that is of pagan *ethnē* (*goyyim*). The Syriac term for pagan, *ḥanfa*, would have undergone a semantic inversion in its passage to Arabic. The Qur'anic concept of *fiṭra*, the original and primordial nature implanted in man by God (Q. 30.30), also reflects true religion and could well be related to the idea of *ḥanīf*.[64] If this were the case, Abraham would have been neither a Jew nor a Christian. To be sure, this hypothesis on Islamic origins is different from that insisting on the Jewish-Christian origins of the Qur'an. The two hypotheses, however, are based on the same hermeneutical principles, as they connect contemporary prophetic activism among the Arabs to the biblical tradition. Can we draw any conclusions from this rather disparate evidence? To my mind, it is probable that some Jewish-Christian groups survived until at least the seventh century. Such groups were probably not more than a few marginal communities, but this fact does not really impinge on the argument. Their

ideas, unbearable for both rabbis and bishops, might well have appeared as a surprisingly attractive version of Christianity, at least for people living on the margins of the Byzantine Empire.[65] In particular, as surmised by Oscar Cullmann in 1930, the idea of the "true prophet" may certainly have survived in some circles. Such a possibility entails a significant reorientation of research on the origins of the Qur'an. Henri Corbin has claimed that arguments about anti-Jewish and anti-Christian polemics in the Qur'an often reflect a category mistake. For him, the Qur'an cannot be either anti-Jewish or anti-Christian, as it is nothing but a Jewish-Christian text. As is well known, Corbin often expressed himself in allusive and hyperbolic terms not always very useful from an epistemological viewpoint. And yet, he was putting his finger on a remarkable phenomenon to which we should devote all our attention. If a text like the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* preserves in Greek a phrase strikingly reminiscent of the Qur'anic *shahāda*, the Jewish-Christian track imposes itself as having offered an exceptional yeast which allowed Muhammad's message to ferment in the rich humus of late antique religious traditions and attitudes. Jewish-Christianity seems not only to have survived across the centuries, but also to have retained a truly seducing power and to have been a key element of what I have proposed calling *praeparatio coranica*.

It is to its heuristic utility that the Jewish-Christian track owes its strength. One should remain aware, however, that it cannot stand alone. A number of reasons prevent us from considering Jewish-Christianity as *the* source of Islam. The evidence is too sparse; the precise mechanisms through which ideas are transmitted are too little known. Moreover, we know, as in the case of Manichaeism, that its influence was often indirect. Somewhat paradoxically, the essentially Jewish-Christian idea of a chain of prophecy offered a model applicable to religious trends stemming from new cultural and ethnic milieus, for Muhammad as well as for Mani. We have not dealt here with a teleological vision of the history of religious ideas. Like any complex historical phenomenon, the birth of Islam is overdetermined. Delimiting it too precisely risks oversimplifying reality and freezes the essentially fluid interaction of ideas and sects. The mystery of the birth of a religion cannot be solved and neither can the alchemical transformation of religious ideas, their passage from fluid to solid state.

[1] On Toland's conception of Jewish-Christianity, see Gesine Palmer, *Ein Freispruch für Paulus: John Tolands Theorie des Judenchristentums, mit einer Neuausgabe von Tolands "Nazarenus" von Claus-Michael Palmer* (Berlin: Institut Kirche und Judentum, 1996).

[2] On the *Gospel of Barnabas*, see *Évangile de Barnabé: Recherches sur la composition et l'origine*, ed. Luigi Cirillo and Michel Frémaux (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977).

[3] John Toland, *Nazarenus, or, Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity* (London: J. Brotherton, J. Roberts, and A. Dodd, 1718); see F. Stanley Jones, *The Rediscovery of Jewish Christianity: From Toland to Baur* (Leiden and Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2012), p. 139.

[4] On the Nazoreans, see especially Ray Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the End of the New Testament Period until Its Disappearance in the Fourth Century* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press; Leiden: Brill, 1988). Cf. Simon Claude Mimouni, "Les Nazoréens: Recherche étymologique et historique," *Revue Biblique* 105 (1998), 208–62. Cf. Mimouni, *Le Judéo-christianisme ancien: Essais historiques*, Patrimoines, (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1998). Two recent studies: *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*, ed. Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), as well as *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts*, ed. Matt Jackson-McCabe (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

[5] Daniel Boyarin, "Rethinking Jewish-Christianity: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category (to which is Appended a Correction of My *Border Lines*)," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 99 (2009), 7–36.

[6] On Docetism and Jewish Christianity, see Guy G. Stroumsa, "Christ's Laughter: Docetic Origins Reconsidered," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12 (2004), 267–88, as well as Guy G. Stroumsa and Ronnie Goldstein, "The Greek and Jewish Origins of Docetism: A New Proposal," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 10 (2007), 423–41.

[7] Günter Stemberger, *Jews and Christians in the Holy Land: Palestine in the Fourth Century* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000), represents the *opinio communis* when he notes (p. 80): "no significant Jewish-Christians communities were left in Palestine itself [in the fourth century]."

[8] John of Damascus, *De haeresibus* 53, Patrologia Graeca 94, 709 B. Although John repeats here a text from Epiphanius, one is allowed to accept his testimony, as he writes from Mar Saba, in the Judean desert, a monastery very close to the Dead Sea. On the Elchasaites, see in particular Gerard P. Luttikhuizen, *The Revelation of Elchasai: Investigations into the Evidence for a Mesopotamian Jewish Apocalypse of the Second Century and Its Reception by Judeo-Christian Propagandists* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985).

[9] Adolf Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 4th ed., 3 vols (Freiburg: Mohr Siebeck, 1909–10), Bd 2, pp. 529–38. As noted by Sidney Griffith, Julius Wellhausen had already put forward the same hypothesis in *Reste arabischen Heidentumes*, p. 232. See Sidney Harrison Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam* (Princeton, N.J. and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 36, n. 84.

[10] Ernest Renan, "Note sur l'identité de la secte gnostique des elchasaites avec les mandaïtes ou sabéens," *Journal Asiatique* 6 (1855), 292–4.; in the following year appeared Daniel Chwolson, *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus* (St Petersburg: Imperial Academy, 1856). Cf. Toufic Fahd, "Sabiʿa," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 8 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), pp. 675–8.

[11] Adolf Schlatter, "Die Entwicklung des jüdischen Christentums zum Islam," *Evangelisches Missions-Magazin*, NF 62 (1918), 251–64; Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des*

Judenchristentums (Tübingen: Mohr, 1949). See also Tor Andræ, *Mahomet, sa vie et sa doctrine* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1945), p. 99: “La notion d’une révélation particulière à chaque peuple est tout-à-fait étrangère à la doctrine chrétienne de la révélation.” Again, Andræ, *Mahomet*, 107: “L’idée de révélation chez Mahomet témoigne donc d’une parenté avec la doctrine ébionite-manichéenne, qui ne peut être fortuite.”

12 See Arculf’s testimony (n. 50 below), as well as the studies of Shlomo Pines discussed in Section III, pp. 154–5 below.

13 Günter Lüling, *Über den Ur-Qurʾān: Ansätze zur Rekonstruktion vorislamischer christlicher Strophenlieder im Qurʾān* (Erlangen: Lüling, 1974); Christoph Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran: Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache* (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 2000).

14 See for instance Claude Gilliot, “Les ‘Informateurs’ juifs et chrétiens de Muhammad: Reprise d’un problème traité par Aloys Sprenger et Theodor Nöldeke,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 22 (1998), 84–126. One must not forget the dynamic interface between Judaism and Christianity in late antiquity, on which, see ch. 6 “Religious Dynamics between Jews and Christians” above.

15 Averil Cameron writes: “Islam took shape within a context of extreme religious and cultural tension.” See Averil Cameron, “The Eastern Provinces in the Seventh Century: Hellenism and the Emergence of Islam,” in *Hellēnismos: Quelques jalons pour une histoire de l’identité grecque: Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, 25–27 octobre 1989*, ed. Suzanne Saïd (Leiden and New York: E. J. Brill, 1991). On the context of nascent Islam, see for instance Fred McGraw Donner, “The Background to Islam,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. Michael Maas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 511–33.

16 See ch. 4 “False Prophet and False Messiah” above.

17 On this, see Yuri Stoyanov, *Defenders and Enemies of the True Cross: The Sasanian Conquest of Jerusalem in 614 and Byzantine Ideology of Anti-Persian Warfare* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2011). Cf. ch. 3 “False Prophets of Early Christianity” and ch. 4 “False Prophet and False Messiah” above.

18 Andreas Kaplony, *The Ḥaram of Jerusalem, 324–1099: Temple, Friday Mosque, Area of Spiritual Power* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2002). See further ch. 9 “Christian Memories and Dreams of Jerusalem” below.

19 Robert G. Hoyland, “Early Islam as a Late Antique Religion,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 1053–77, esp. p. 1069.

20 Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1952).

21 See esp. C. J. Robin, “Arabia and Ethiopia,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (Oxford and New York Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 247–332.

22 See Glen Warren Bowersock, *The Throne of Adulis: Red Sea Wars on the Eve of Islam* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

23 See Peter Sarris, *Empires of Faith: The Fall of Rome to the Rise of Islam, 500–700*, Oxford History of Medieval Europe (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[24] On this, see Glen Warren Bowersock, *Empires in Collision in Late Antiquity* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2012).

[25] C. J. Robin, "Les Signes de la prophétie en Arabie à l'époque de Muhammad (fin VIe siècle et début VIIe siècle de l'ère chrétienne)," in *La raison des signes: Présages, rites, destin dans les sociétés de la Méditerranée ancienne*, ed. Stella Georgoudi, Renée Koch Piettre, and Francis Schmidt (Leiden and Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2012), pp. 433–76. Tor Andræ had already spoken of Muhammad's eschatological piety. Cf. Tor Andræ, *Der Ursprung des Islams und das Christentum* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1926), p. 59.

[26] Iwona Gadja, "Quel monothéisme en Arabie du sud ancienne?," in *Juifs et chrétiens en Arabie aux Ve et VIe siècles: Regards croisés sur les sources*, ed. by Joëlle Beaucamp, Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet, and C. J. Robin (Paris: Association des amis du Centre d'histoire et de civilisation de Byzance, 2010), pp. 107–20.

[27] François Villeneuve, "La résistance des cultes béthyliques d'Arabie face au monothéisme: De Paul à Barsauma et à Muhammad," in *Le Problème de la christianisation du monde antique*, ed. Hervé Inglebert, Sylvain Destephen, and Bruno Dumézil (Paris: Picard, 2010), pp. 219–31 (p. 228).

[28] On the Jews of Hijaz, see Robert G. Hoyland, "The Jews of the Hijaz in the Qur'ān and in their Inscriptions," in *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān in its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 91–116.

[29] See Shaul Shaked, "Popular Religion in Sasanian Babylonia," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 21 (1992), 103–17, esp. 115. For the broader perspective, see Patricia Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[30] See esp. Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike: Ein europäischer Zugang* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2010).

[31] John E. Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1978). In that same year appeared Edward Said's *Orientalism*, a polemical book soon to become a cult book. On Wansbrough, see esp. Gerald R. Hawting, "John Wansbrough, Islam, and Monotheism," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 9 (1997), 23–38.

[32] Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. viii. Cf. ch. 4 "False Prophet and False Messiah" above.

[33] Sarah Stroumsa, "The Muslim Context of Medieval Jewish Philosophy," in *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy: From Antiquity Through the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Steven M. Nadler and Tamar Rudavsky (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 39–59 (pp. 54–7).

[34] On the concept of community, see Garth Fowden, "Religious Communities," in *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Post-Classical World*, ed. G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 82–106.

[35] For an updated *status quaestionis*, see Krisztina Szilagyi, "Muhammad and the Monk: The Making of the Christian Baḥīra Legend," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008), 169–214.

[36] On *naṣārā*, see the references to the studies of Gnilka in note 37 and de Blois in note 44 below. On Waraka, see Chase F. Robinson, "Waraka b. Nawfal," *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002), 142–3. Robinson notes that we have few biographical details, most of them legendary, on Waraka, an Arab monotheist contemporary of the Prophet. The possibility that Waraka was an Ebionite or an Elchasaite has caught the fancy of some contemporary Arab intellectuals. Thus Joseph Azzi, in a book written in Arabic and translated into French with the title *La prêtre et le prophète: Aux sources du Coran* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2001), suggests, without bringing any evidence, that "la véritable intention de Waraqa était de désigner Mohammed pour lui succéder à la tête de l'assemblée des nazaréens de la Mecque" (p. 85) and that he had tried to unify the Jewish-Christian sects (p. 86). Cf. Édouard-Marie Gallez, *Le Messie et son prophète: aux origines de l'islam* (Versailles: Éditions de Paris, 2005–10), as well as vol. II: *Du Muhammad des Califes au Muhammad de l'histoire* and vol. III, *Histoire et légendologie*, which refers to the various sources in a highly confused way. Gallez cites Wilhelm Rudolph, *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans von Judentum und Christentum* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1922).

[37] Joachim Gnilka, *Die Nazarener und der Koran: Eine Spurensuche* (Freiburg: Herder, 2007).

[38] *Adv. haer.* V. 1. 3; cf. Epiphanius, *Pan*. 30. 16, *Acts of Peter and Simon*, and Clement, *Strom*. I.96, who refers to heretics celebrating the Eucharist with pure water. On wine in ancient Christianity, see Andrew Brian McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[39] The idea of mistaken (or wrong) passages inserted in Scripture is found in the second-century Valentinian theologian Ptolemaeus's *Epistle to Flora*. See for instance *Ep. Flora* 5.4 and 6.2 in Ptolemy, *Lettre à Flora*, ed. & trans. Gilles Quispel (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1966).

[40] Renan, "Note sur l'identité de la secte gnostique"; Chwolson, *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus*. Cf. Fahd, "Sabi'a," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, pp. 675–8.

[41] For the critical edition, see Ludwig Koenen and Cornelia Römer, *Der Kölner Mani-Code: Űber das Werden seines Leibes* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1988). Cf. Albert Henrichs, "Mani and the Babylonian Baptists: A Historical Confrontation," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 77 (1973), 23–59.

[42] Robert Simon, "Mani and Muhammad," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 21 (1997), 118–41.

[43] See Michel Tardieu, "L'Arrivée des Manichéens à Al-Ḥīra (?)," in *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam, VIIe–VIIIe siècles*, ed. Pierre Canivet and Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1992), as well as Michel Tardieu, "L'Arabie du nord-est d'après les documents manichéens," *Studia Iranica*, 23 (1994), 59–75.

[44] François de Blois, "The 'Sabians' (*Ṣābi'ūn*) in Pre-Islamic Arabia," *Acta Orientalia* 56 (1995), 39–61; de Blois, "*Naṣrānī* (*Nazoraios*) and *Ḥanīf* (*ethnikos*): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65 (2002), 1–30; de Blois, "Elchasai—Manes—Muḥammad: Manichäismus und Islam in religionshistorischem Vergleich," *Der Islam* 81 (2004), 31–48.

[45] See for instance Ps-Clement, *Hom*. 2. 15. 17; cf. *Hom*.2. 38. 1 as well as *Recognitiones* 1. 21. 8–9. See further Geneviève Gobillot, "Das Begriff 'Buch' im Koran im Licht der Pseudo-Klementinischen Schriften," in *Inârah 4: Schriften zur frühen Islamgeschichte zum Koran*, ed. Markus Gros and Karl-Heinz Ohlig (Berlin: Hans Schiler, 2009), pp. 397–489.

[46] On the idea of *taḥrīf*, see *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998), vol. 10, pp. 111–12.

[47] On the Audians, and for a discussion of Puech's argument, see Guy G. Stroumsa, "Jewish and Gnostic Traditions among the Audians," in *Sharing the Sacred: Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Holy Land: First–Fifteenth Centuries CE*, ed. Arieh Kofsky and Guy G. Stroumsa (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 1998), pp. 97–108.

[48] Holger Michael Zellentin, *The Qur'an's Legal Culture: The* Didascalia Apostolorum *as a Point of Departure* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013). See also Zellentin, *Islam Before Muhammad*, forthcoming.

[49] *Heis estin ho Theos, kai plēn autou ouk estin Theos,* Ps.-Clement, *Hom.* 16.7.9.

[50] Adomnan, *De locis sanctis*, quoted by Shlomo Pines, "Notes on Islam and on Arabic Christianity and Judaeo-Christianity," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4 (1984), 135–52.

[51] Pines differs here from de Blois, for whom the Qur'ānic *naṣāra* are Jewish-Christians.

[52] Gerald R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). See for instance his conclusion, on pages 150–1. Cf. Patricia Crone, "The Religion of the Qur'ānic Pagans: God and the Lesser Deities," *Arabica* 57 (2010), 151–200. See further her "Pagan Arabs as God-Fearers," in *Islam and its Past: Jāhiliyya and Late Antiquity in the Qur'ān and Tradition*, ed. Carol Bakhos and Michael Cook, Oxford Studies in the Abrahamic Religions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

[53] These articles are reprinted in Shlomo Pines, *Studies in the History of Religion*, ed. Guy G. Stroumsa, The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines, 4 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1996).

[54] Pines's discovery triggered a virulent polemical response by Samuel Stern, who had collaborated with Pines in analyzing the newly discovered manuscript of 'Abd al-Jabbār. See Shlomo Pines, "The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity according to a New Source," in *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* (Jerusalem: The Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1966), 2(13), 237–310.

[55] See for instance Q. 7.159, on a group (*umma*) of the Just among "Moses' people," and Q. 43.65 and 61.14, according to which a faction (*ṭā'ifa*) from the *Banū Isrā'īl* "believed," while another one remained "unbelieving." On medieval Muslim authors discussing Jewish sects, see Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[56] Fred McGraw Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010). Donner's thesis has been strongly rejected by Patricia Crone, "'Among the Believers': Review of Donner's *Muhammad and the Believers*," *The Tablet* (August 10, 2010) <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/42023/among-the-believers>.

[57] Sozomène, *Histoire ecclésiastique*, II.4 (vol. 1, pp. 244–9 [Sources Chrétiennes 306]). On this festival, see Arieh Kofsky, "Mamre: A Case of Regional Cult?," in *Sharing the Sacred: Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Holy Land: First–Fifteenth Centuries CE*, ed. Arieh Kofsky and Guy G. Stroumsa (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 1998), pp. 19–30. See also Elizabeth K. Fowden, "Sharing Holy Places," *Common Knowledge* 8, 124–46.

[58] Sozomène, *Histoire ecclésiastique*, VI.38.11 (vol. 3, pp. 242–6 [Sources Chrétiennes 495]). Sebeos, an Armenian ecclesiastical historian writing in the second half of the seventh century, also mentions that the Arabs had learned from the Jews about their Abrahamic ascendance. (Quoted by Nevo–Koren [n. 61 below], 187).

[59] See in particular Nagel, "'Der erste Muslim'." Crone and Cook, in *Hagarism*, grant much importance to the figure of Abraham in the late antique background of Islam. See also Michael Cook, *Muhammad* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 81: "This evidence [from Sozomen] is not lightly to be set aside…[There is] no evidence that would show any direct link between this early religion of Abraham and Muhammad's message…, but it is at least a confirmation that Muhammad was not the first in the field…" On the late antique background of Islam, see Aziz Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allāh and his People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[60] *Hist. ecclés.* I.4.5 and I.4.9–10.

[61] Yehuda D. Nevo and Judith Koren, *Crossroads to Islam: The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2003), pp. 189–90.

[62] Cf. Fergus Millar, "Hagar, Ishmael, Josephus, and the Origins of Islam," in Fergus Millar, *Rome, the Greek World, and the East*, vol. 3: *The Greek World, the Jews, and the East*, ed. Hannah M. Cotton and Guy M. Rogers (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), pp. 351–78. On the Nessana papyri, see Rachel Stroumsa, "People and Identities in Nessana" (unpublished PhD thesis, Duke University, 2008) <http://hdl.handle.net/10161/619> [accessed 30 June 2014]. For another allusion to the "Abrahamic" dimension of earliest Islam, see the "Sarah fresco" at Quṣayr 'Amra, which dates from the Umayyad period, and may reflect Sarah's identification with the Arabs. Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 145–9.

[63] Pseudo-Clement, *Recognitiones*, I.33.

[64] See Geneviève Gobillot, *La Conception originelle: Ses interprétations et fonctions chez les penseurs musulmans* (Le Caire: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2000).

[65] See Patricia Crone, "Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980), 59–95; Patricia Crone, "Jewish-Christianity and the Qur'ān," forthcoming.

Christian Memories and Dreams of Jerusalem

Since the birth of Christianity Jerusalem, with, at its core, the ruins of the Temple, represented the epicenter of the chthonic rift between Judaism and Christianity. This rift was often dormant throughout late antiquity, but could never be ignored, as eschatological outbursts happened from time to time. As we saw in Chapter 4 “False Prophet and False Messiah”, the seventh century represented such a period of intense flurry, often focusing on the destroyed Temple in Jerusalem; it is within such a framework that Islam was born. The present chapter will follow some of the complex representations of Jerusalem in the intertwined histories of the Abrahamic religions.

I

From the perspective of the historian of comparative religion, the real peculiarity of the Temple Mount lies in its resilience and versatility. In striking contrast to the Delphic *omphalos*—the navel of the earth—this *axis mundi* has, throughout history, symbolized more a border between clashing civilizations than the epicenter of a culture. There are other places that are sacred to more than one religious tradition.[1] But no other place on earth, to my knowledge, has retained to such a degree, over centuries, its deeply attractive power as the venue for a series of cultures transforming themselves and replacing one another.[2]

If religious history, to a great extent, is the history of the devaluations and revalorizations of various manifestations of the sacred, then the Temple Mount can be said to model a significant portion of it. Over the last two thousand years, at least, the Temple Mount has constituted a unique pole of attraction for competing myths and rituals, both successive and juxtaposed. Moreover, the transmission of sacral power from one tradition to another has always been compounded by the interaction between those traditions and the dialectics of their own transformation.

As far as we know, the Temple Mount first owed its sacredness to Solomon's construction of his Temple there. In other words, its holiness was acquired rather than native. What is perhaps most striking is the retention of its sacred character for Jews even after repeated destructions. Rather than losing its sacred character, it seems to have become, more than ever before, the locus of God's Presence, or *shekhinah* (from the root *sh.k.n.*, dwell)—a concept that developed in rabbinic literature only after Titus's destruction of the Temple. As long as the Temple stood, there was no need to emphasize that it was the dwelling place of the divinity. In a sense, the emptiness of the Temple Mount during the Byzantine period reflected the aniconic nature of God in the former Temple. Indeed, to the puzzlement of pagans, the Temple of the Jews contained no statue of their God, not even in the Holy of Holies. Pagans could thus easily consider the Temple to be empty. Incidentally, the Temple's emptiness is echoed, as it were, in the Cenotaph of the church of the Anastasis and in the empty space

of a mosque, in particular that of the *miḥrāb*, the niche indicating the *qibla*, Mecca's direction.

From the destruction of the Second Temple, however, the Jews were no longer the only community concerned with the Temple Mount. Between the fourth and the seventh centuries, Christian leaders sought to erase the memory of the Temple (in contradistinction to the splendor of the Basilica of the Anastasis)—to accomplish, in a sense, what the Romans called the damnation of memory (*damnatio memoriae*) of the barren Mount. But, for the Jews, despite its barrenness, the Mount became the place that most powerfully recorded the glory that was once Jerusalem.[3] It became what French historians call a "place of memory" (*lieu de mémoire)*, or rather, a memory of the place (*mémoire du lieu)*. Notwithstanding the report of Dio Cassius (69.12), the Hadrianic Capitolium or temple of Zeus, which stood until the fourth century, was not built on the Temple Mount. Though there may have been some imperial statues, the holy place, in the main, stood desolate and empty, pointing—for Jews—to a future rebuilding. In the Christian mind, too, the Temple would play a part in the future, but only in the eschatological future, when the Antichrist would establish his throne there.[4] The eschatological dimension of Christian thought, however, paled with time, particularly after Constantine—or so it seemed. For Jews, on the other hand, the reconstruction of the Temple was not only conceivable in theory—and, of course, prayed for three times daily—but was also considered achievable in practice, as showed by the events surrounding the Emperor Julian's authorization of its reconstruction in 361.

As highlighted by both Christian and Jewish attitudes to the future of the Temple Mount, there can be no sacred place without a sacred time. While the Temple was standing, sacred times were those of sacrifices, of holy days. After its destruction, the sacred time, the temporal axis around which history was developing, became the eschatological time of its reconstruction. The barren Temple Mount, then, points to a time as well as to the building that once stood there. Or, rather, it points to two opposite moments in time, past and future—when the Temple stood, and when it will stand again—and to Israel and humankind at the beginning and end of history, the *Urzeit* and the *Endzeit*. In a sense, one can say that the sacredness of time is a projection of the sacredness of space. Between Christians and Jews, then, the Temple Mount stood at the core of a dialectic: the one's loss was the other's gain. For Jews, the reconstruction of

Temple would herald the advent of the Messiah, while for Christians it would announce that of the Antichrist.[5] Hence, the Temple Mount played (and plays) a role in clashing visions of the end, at the core of the competition between the two religions.

Various clashes between civilizations, focusing on the Jerusalem Temple, had occurred in the past: the Babylonians, from the East, and the Romans, from the West, had each in turn destroyed it for its reflection of a vanquished people's identity. Later, the invaders of the seventh century CE, for a brief but violent time the Persians and then the Arabs, would bring back with a vengeance the eschatological expectations of earlier times, which the Christians had thought banished to the back of their consciousness.

Two highly different vignettes, both from Christian sources, symbolize the Christian reaction to the victorious entry of Caliph Omar into Jerusalem. The first portrays him, still dusty from the journey, dismounting from his horse to be invited by Patriarch Sophronius to pray in the Church of the Anastasis (Holy Sepulchre). Omar allegedly replied politely but firmly in the negative. Had he accepted, he added, Muslims would have transformed the church into a mosque after his death. In the second vignette, Sophronius laments seeing Omar on the Temple Mount; for him, indeed, it is nothing less than the repudiation of the desolation announced by Christ.

By transforming the so-called Mosque of Omar into a church, dedicated as the Templum Solomonis, the Crusaders, at least for a while, changed the parameters of the opposition between the Mount and the Anastasis. In 1099 they could exclaim, "Ad Dominicum sepulcrum, dehinc etiam ad Templum!" ("Up to the tomb of the Lord, hence, up to the Temple!"). The Crusaders, indeed, are a reminder of the Christians' ultimate inability to settle for a spiritual temple or forget the old one of stone.[6] But this inability could only be due to the dominating presence of the Qubbat al-Sahra—the Dome of the Rock.

II

Moving between the Foundation Stone (*even hashetiyya*), the Holy of Holies, the Temple, Jerusalem, and the Holy Land, we have before us, as it were, a series of Russian dolls. All seem alike; all reflect the same sacred character. In order to understand more precisely the religious dimensions of the Temple Mount, we must also reflect upon the power encapsulated in the name of Jerusalem in religious and cultural history and memory. Originally, to be sure, it is from the Temple that Jerusalem received its sacred character. Later, however, the Holy City became emblematic of the sacred locus where the Temple had once stood and where it would eventually be rebuilt. It would be a mistake, therefore, to limit our inquiry to the Temple Mount itself, without calling attention to Jerusalem's metaphorical dimension in cultural memory.

The concept of cultural memory (*kulturelles Gedächtnis*) was developed, in particular, by art historian Aby Warburg between the two World Wars. In order to be really useful this concept should be connected to that of collective memory (*mémoire collective*), a term coined in the 1930s by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs.[7] Any cultural memory, indeed, belongs *ipso facto* to collective memory.[8] The early Christian thinkers whom we call the church fathers launched the process through which the name of Jerusalem was transformed into a major icon of Western cultural memory. This process was directly related to what Christoph Markschies has recently called its "devaluation" in early Christianity.[9] Cultural memory does not necessarily stand in contradistinction to religious memory, but rather to the radical intensification of religious feelings involved in eschatology.

The earliest Christian attitudes toward Jerusalem seem to have been related directly to the millenarian or chiliastic view founded upon the announcement of Jesus' reign of a millennium (*chilia etē*) in Jerusalem. Although this view was not the only one available (the African bishop Cyprian never mentions Jerusalem), it seems to have been dominant.[10] As Ernst Käsemann put it, "Apocalyptics is the mother of Christian theology."[11] In the second century, Papias and Justin Martyr espoused millenarian views of this kind. Enthusiastic expectations of a return of

Christ in glory (*parousia*) and a restitution of things past (*apokatastasis*) seem to have been inseparably bound up with the Christian faith down to the middle of the second century. This tendency was broken only by Marcion; Marcion's opponents, such as Irenaeus, returned even afterwards to broaching the end of time.

Can we detect the mechanism by which such eschatological views were contested and so ceased to prevail in the mainstream tradition? Marcion, a contemporary of Justin in the mid-second century, rejected the Old Testament (as well as major parts of the New Testament), arguing that Christianity was a religion of a new kind and possessed no Jewish roots. He seems to have been the first opponent of chiliastic ideas in early Christianity. As Stefan Heid has shown, the argument over millenarianism in the second century was directly related to the controversy between Jews and Christians.[12] The Jewish wars, especially the revolt launched by Bar Kokhba in 132–35 CE, form the background to this controversy and to the debate over millenarianism and the role of Jerusalem. For most church fathers, the Holy Land remained the land of the Jews and a reconstruction of the Temple meant a Jewish victory, at least from a spiritual perspective. Indeed, expectations of this kind were to be found among the various Jewish-Christian groups, such as the Ebionites, for whom the rebuilding (*restitutio*, *apokatastasis*) of the Temple was a central eschatological belief.

Marcion rejected all that, including beliefs in the eschaton and about the role of Jerusalem at the end of time. For him, such beliefs were simply irrelevant to the Christian faith. No wonder Irenaeus—for whom Marcion, along with various dualist and Gnostic thinkers, was the archenemy—insists precisely on eschatology. Deservedly called "the theologian of chiliasm," Irenaeus is the greatest writer on eschatological Jerusalem. The last chapters of his magnum opus, *Against the Heresies*, are devoted to the battle between Christ and Antichrist that was to precede the reign of Christ in Jerusalem, waged up to the destruction of the Temple. Eschatology is the principal insurance against the metaphorization of Christian beliefs; it possesses an irrevocably concrete element.

It is no accident that Tertullian, the late-second and early-third-century North African church father who first established the antinomy of "Athens versus Jerusalem," eventually joined the ecstatic and prophetic Montanist movement. For the followers of Montanus, in the second half of the second century, a new prophecy, delivered to women, announced the imminent

descent to earth of the Heavenly Jerusalem.[13] Montanism, then, exhibits with particular clarity the direct connection between the role played by (heavenly or earthly) Jerusalem at the end of time and the intensity of eschatological expectations.[14]

The Christian idea of *translatio Hierosolymae*, the holy city's travel in space, seems first to appear with Montanus, who, according to Eusebius, "gave the name of Jerusalem to Pepuza and Tymion, which are little towns in Phrygia."[15] As confirmed by Tertullian, who had inside knowledge of Montanist beliefs, this probably meant that the heavenly Jerusalem was seen as having descended upon Pepuza and Tymion. The heretical status of the Montanists in the third century and the Christian invention of the Holy Land in the fourth century probably forestalled the implantation of *translatio Hierosolymae* in patristic literature. Nevertheless, this concept never quite disappeared. Throughout Christian history, it emerged as an expression of sectarian eschatology in such phenomena as the Hussite reconstitution of the Holy Land in fifteenth-century Bohemia, the Taborites' Tabor, and the expectations of the New Zion sectarians in nineteenth-century Russia for the descent of the Heavenly Jerusalem.[16]

If the New Jerusalem can descend from heaven onto Pepuza, a small town in Asia Minor, who needs the city of David anymore?[17] Indeed, new Zions exist in various cultural surroundings. A famous case is that of the churches carved in the rock in Lâlibalâ, in Ethiopia. This new Jerusalem became a major pilgrim destination in periods when Axum was inaccessible.[18] Today we think mainly of Baptist churches in the southern United States or in Africa, or of the Swedenborgian churches of "the New Jerusalem."[19]

The failure of early Christian apocalyptical movements, illustrated by the perception of the Montanists as heretics and the postponement to the end of days of Christ's Second Coming, his *parousia*, had direct implications for representations of Jerusalem. Rather than alternative earthly locations, or the idea of an eschatological *renovatio*, it is the metaphor of a *spiritual* Jerusalem that was to become prevalent in the early Christian mind. This Jerusalem was the Christian's true fatherland and it was in heaven—from which, according to Rev. 21: 2, the New Jerusalem was to descend. In this regard, the early Christian writers were following in the footsteps of Jewish apocalypticism. In IV Esdras, a Jewish text redacted

at the end of the first century CE, the eschatological element is still prominent: Jerusalem would be established by God in the messianic era.[20] The Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch weakens this element by describing the heavenly Jerusalem as having been prepared by God at the origin of the world, thus pointing to the direct relationship between the origins of the world and the end of time.

The transformation of the ideal city is completed in the late second century with Clement of Alexandria, who recalls that the Stoics referred to the heavens as the true city.[21] For him, as a Christian, the obvious parallel to the heavenly city of the Stoics was the heavenly Jerusalem, which he calls "my Jerusalem."[22] We touch here on the roots of Jerusalem's mystical meaning. Origen takes up and develops Clement's views on the holy city (*polis*). Jerusalem, whose Hebrew name (*Yerushalayim*) is interpreted as meaning "vision of peace" (*yir'e shalom*), can mean the Church, but also, in the tropological sense, the soul.[23] A similar allegorical interpretation appears in the writings of the fourth-century Origenist, Didymus the Blind. For him, too, the significance of Jerusalem is threefold: it is at once the virtuous soul, the Church, and the heavenly city of the living God. We shall return to the "vision of peace" (*visio pacis*) metaphor of Jerusalem, which runs as a thread through the centuries.[24] One further formative metaphor stems directly from Paul: the supernal Jerusalem, mother of the Christians, is also called *eleuthera*—free (Gal. 4: 26).[25]

For Marcion and the Gnostics, the whole Jewish heritage was a stumbling block on the way to a fully emancipated Christianity. The Gnostics did not need Judaism's traditional eschatological expectations, since they claimed to live in the redeemed time of "realized eschatology." In their struggle against such objectors, various church fathers after Irenaeus were led to insist, precisely, upon the hopes of Christ's *parousia* and the last and decisive battle between the forces of good and evil. But such hopes were also those of Jews and of Jewish-Christians, with whom the same church fathers were also engaged in intense competition about the proper understanding of the scriptures.

Thus, with regard to Jerusalem, two distinct phenomena can be observed in early Christianity. The first is the distinction, made more and more clearly with time, between the earthly and the heavenly Jerusalem. This distinction, which, again, is of Jewish origin, received a new impulse in

early Christian writings, already with Paul. The two Jerusalems became completely disconnected, as they never had been in Jewish writings. The earthly Jerusalem remained identified, essentially, as the city of the Jews, who had killed Christ and whose Temple had been destroyed in divine punishment. This Temple would not be rebuilt. “And I saw no Temple in it”—that is, in the New Jerusalem come down from heaven—says the visionary in the Apocalypse of John, the most topical of all early Christian eschatological texts (Rev. 21: 22). The heavenly Jerusalem soon became a metaphor for the community of the saints, or the “city of God” in Augustine’s parlance. It was invested with all the dreams and qualities attributed to Jerusalem in eschatological thought, but very little remained here of the original meaning of the name.

The Augustinian typology of the two cities has its roots in Tyconius, whose *Commentary on the Apocalypse* referred to two cities, Babylon and Jerusalem.[26] For Augustine, Babylon represents power and politics, while the heavenly Jerusalem—of which he sings, “Quando de illa loquor, finire nolo” (“When I speak of her, I don’t want to stop.”)[27]—represents the Church, the Bride of Christ. Babylon refers to life in the present, in this world, Jerusalem to the future life, in which the boundaries of time will be overcome and God will be praised forever, *in saecula saeculorum*. The major formative influence of this typology on medieval perceptions needs no further stressing.[28]

The second phenomenon is the weakening of eschatological beliefs, expressed in the progressive erosion, from the second to the fourth century, of the expectation of Christ’s second coming. As it became more and more difficult to maintain intensive hope of an imminent advent, the acme of the Christian message became clearly entrenched in the past. With the fading of its future, Jerusalem itself, a small, marginal city in the Empire with the forever destroyed Temple and Golgotha at its heart, was bound to lose almost all significance. Paradoxically, the less important the city of Jerusalem became, the more the name “Jerusalem” seemed to gain in evocative power. Late antique Christianity, indeed, bequeathed the overwhelming resonance of Jerusalem to European culture, eastern and western. Jerusalem was now Rome: in the words of Jerome, “Romam factam Hierosolymam.” It was also Byzantium; Constantinople is often called “the second Jerusalem,” while Moscow, later, would become “the third Jerusalem.” The whole world would eventually become Jerusalem.

This is literally true in the *Commentary on the Apocalypse* written in the fourth century by Victorinus of Poetovio (Ptuj in present-day Slovenia): at the end of time, Jerusalem will expand and cover the face of the earth.[29] Similar conceptions appear in rabbinic literature as well.

In both the fourth and the sixth centuries, major architectural achievements sought to offer new, Christianized versions of the old Jewish Temple. Eusebius, Constantine's panegyrist, described the Basilica of the Anastasis as "the new Temple," while Justinian, upon entering the newly built Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, allegedly declared: "I have surpassed thee, O Solomon!"[30]

It is traditionally assumed that, by the fourth century, the chiliastic trends so prominent in the early stages of Christianity had more or less burnt themselves out; yet, they seem to reappear with renewed strength in the seventh century, with the same old scenario being played out in Jerusalem, in particular around the Temple Mount. Indeed, the seventh century, a period of dramatic religious and political transformations in the Near East, has long been recognized as a time when eschatological beliefs were particularly activated in the Byzantine Empire.

III

In ancient Israel, as we learn from Max Weber, a major tension revolved around the Temple and its service.[31] The prophets' charisma versus the priests' routine: two radically different kinds of religious action confronted one another, one pushing for change, the other for stability. In the seventh century CE, centuries after the destruction of the Temple, the very place where it had been built, its locus, seems to have been once more at the epicenter of a prophetic movement.

At least from the conquest of Jerusalem by the Sasanians in 614 and the capture of the Holy Cross, the Christian world was rife with expectations of the *Endzeit*, with its traditional imagery of cosmic war between the forces of light and darkness. The Byzantines were slow to understand the true faith of the new conquerors, which they understood at first as being a new Christian heresy.[32] What would eventually settle into a centuries-long, deep-seated political and religious conflict, sometimes more overt and sometimes relatively dormant, started as a "big bang," epitomized more than anything else by the conquest of Jerusalem by the Arabs in 638 and the ensuing dramatic changes in the city's religious topography. Scholars have recently highlighted the centrality in these polemics of the Holy Land, the Holy City, and its core, the Temple Mount, as well as their direct impact on the earliest Islamic program in Jerusalem.[33]

The Christians had relocated the sanctified locus from the Temple Mount, now barren, to the new Basilica of the Anastasis. The city's Islamic conquerors, seeking to accomplish what we could call, in the Hegelian sense, an *Aufhebung* of both Judaism and Christianity, moved its sacred core back to the Temple Mount. As we saw in Chapter 4, there is reason to believe that the early Muslim rulers intended to rebuild the Temple and even to install a kind of Temple ritual. This perception of things was also aimed at convincing the Jews that the end of time was drawing near and that the Caliph was the expected Messiah. In the Umayyad period, at least, the Temple Mount, not yet called *al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf*, was viewed both as the Temple rebuilt and as the mosque of Jerusalem.[34] If some Jews, however, might have been tempted to place the dramatic events in an eschatological perspective, they were soon disappointed. For them, the

construction of a new kind of temple in place of the old was perceived as no less an erasure of the Jewish dimension than the Christian dislocation of the sacred. Moreover, since the Anastasis remained standing, it would retain its sacredness (albeit lessened) under the Islamic regime.

The new "clash of civilizations" between the Christian and the Islamic imperial states was nurtured in the cocoon of the Jewish–Christian clash of interpretations, which only superficially appeared essentially to reiterate, again and again, old arguments over a long-decided issue. The argumentation of these polemics, which centered upon the interpretation of biblical prophecies, revolved mainly around the image of Christ as the Messiah announced by the prophets of Israel. For Jews, the Messiah was yet to come; for Christians, he was to return in full glory and establish his kingdom, at long last, over all the earth. For the Chiliasts of the first centuries—most clearly exemplified, perhaps, by Irenaeus—Jerusalem, and in particular the Temple Mount, was to be the epicenter of the cosmic events that would occur at the end of time.[35] The debate focused on the inheritance of the Holy Land and the restoration to it of the Jews. Early Christian chiliastic expectations had very strong Jewish roots. In particular, as noted in Chapter 4, the Antichrist is strikingly similar to the figure of the false prophet in the pre-Christian Jewish sources and was probably constructed from the latter.[36]

For Christians, the Messiah expected by the Jews would be the last impostor, the Antichrist. The Jews, on the other hand, believed that they were being ruled by believers in a false messiah.[37] With the violent conquest by the Persians and its deeply humiliating result, the exile of the Holy Cross, and then the new wave of successful invasion by the barbarian Arabs, the old questions were raised again, with a new urgency. These Arabs, streaming from their southern desert and claiming to follow the lead of their prophet—who could they really be, if not the powerful arm of the Jews, sent to reclaim their possessions in the Holy Land and the Holy City? Paradoxically, the great fear of the Christians had more to do with the shadow of the Jews than with the Arab invaders.

Omar's conquest of Jerusalem in 638 was bound to rekindle both the fears of the Christians and the hopes of the Jews and bring them to new levels of intensity. In the words of the seventh-century historian Sebeos, it appears quite clearly that the Jews began building a structure on the Temple Mount in the first years after the conquest:

> … the plot of the Jewish rebels, who, finding support from the Hagarenes for a short time, planned to [re]build the Temple of Solomon. Locating the place called Holy of Holies, they constructed [the Temple] without a pedestal, to serve as their place of prayer. But the Ishmaelites envied [the Jews], expelled them from the place, and named the same building their own place of prayer. [The Jews] built a temple for their worship elsewhere.[38]

Apparently, the first Al-Aqsa Mosque was built only later.

The Jewish sources from Arabia are scarce and difficult to interpret, but it seems that some Jews, at least, did at first see in Muhammad a messianic (or pre-messianic) figure. For Christians, on the other hand, the concept of "Messiah" was bound to remain quite puzzling, since *Christos* (a literal translation into Greek of Hebrew *mashiaḥ*, "anointed") was, for them, the name of the Savior.

In Chapter 4, reference was made to the *Doctrina Jacobi*, a crucial Greek document dating from the very beginning of the Islamic conquests, in which the Jews considered Muhammad a false prophet (*pseudoprophētēs*). We also discussed the figure of the false messiah and of the false prophet as they appear in Christian and Jewish late antique texts, such as the Jewish *Apocalypse of Zerubbabel* and the Christian *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*. The latter, a fundamental witness to the eschatological perception of the Islamic conquest and a text that would become, in Latin translation, a major source of medieval eschatology, also mentions a false Messiah, *mashiḥa degala*.[39] This *Degala* seems to be the source of the *Dajjāl*, the figure paralleling the Antichrist in Islamic eschatological texts. Moreover, as we saw in Chapter 8, only Jewish-Christians, of all the various Jewish and Christian groups, conceived of the Messiah as a prophet. Moreover, some of their core religious beliefs, in particular their Docetism, are strikingly reminiscent of those of the Qur'an.

In recent years, important epigraphic discoveries have transformed our perception of pre-Islamic monotheism in the Arabian Peninsula. It seems that the cross-fertilization of Jewish and Christian beliefs, the centrality of the Holy Land and in particular of the Temple Mount, and the eschatological expectations of both Jews and Christians should be perceived as the true prelude to Islam.

IV

The Christian transformation of Jerusalem and of the Temple Mount, however, is not bound to happen only at the end of time. The ubiquity of Jerusalem is also manifested in the representations of the Basilica of the Anastasis built in various European cities in the Latin Middle Ages. In certain cases, in particular in Bologna, it is the whole earthly city of Jerusalem that is reconstituted, a theme park of sorts, complete with Golgotha, the Mount of Olives, Kidron, and Gethsemane. One did not have to go on a crusade in order to reach Jerusalem; it could be reproduced anywhere, in any city or in any cloister.[40]

The other regnant Christian transformation of Jerusalem is to be found in the mystical envisioning of the heavenly Jerusalem, to which the religious virtuoso is called to ascend in heart and mind. Mysticism, with its insistence on immediacy and interiority, would seem to be the antipode of eschatology. But here, too, one should note that various mystical meanings of Jerusalem took on an eschatological dimension in Christian history.

An apocalyptic Christian spirituality was to survive through the centuries, permitting the actualization and vivification of perceptions often muted or neutralized in mainstream tradition. The great twelfth-century Calabrian visionary Joachim of Fiore is said to have experienced a conversion to the inner life during his pilgrimage to the Holy Land as a young man. He later made extensive use of the name of Jerusalem in his *Book of Figures*. The most puzzling antithesis in this book is perhaps that of Jerusalem/Ecclesia and Babylon/Rome. But for Joachim, the Roman Church is always Jerusalem, never Rome. If Babylon is the realm of the devil, the heavenly kingdom of God is symbolized by Jerusalem, whose sons “are pilgrims sojourning in the midst of Babylon.”[41] At the end of history there will be a third apotheosis of Jerusalem, after the reign of David in the earthly Jerusalem and the papacy of Sylvester in Rome. In a detailed description of the heavenly Jerusalem in his *Eternal Gospel*, Joachim points to the precise symbolism of its various components, named in Rev. 21, such as the different precious stones of which it is built. He insists that in the heavenly Jerusalem there is no Temple built by men, since the Father and the Son are themselves the only Temple of the Spirit.

Via the intermediacy of Augustine and Isidore of Seville (*c*.560–636), the traditional etymology of Jerusalem as referring to a vision of peace became prominent in medieval texts.[42] The last avatar of the perception of the earthly Jerusalem in the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance reflects a new dimension to this mystical *visio pacis*. From a purely spiritual vision, it also becomes the best metaphor for an eschatological dream of peace on earth between religions and civilizations.

In his *Peace of the Faith*, Nicolaus Cusanus (1401–64) dreams of a religious concordat agreed in heaven, the only rational region, by wise Christians, Jews, and Muslims. Given full powers, they then meet in Jerusalem, their common religious center, to receive in the name of all the single faith and they establish perpetual peace within the city, "in order that in this peace, the Creator of all things be glorified in all *saecula*. Amen."[43]

The development of ethnological curiosity, also towards "Turks" (Muslims) and Jews, together with the sorrows generated by religious strife throughout Europe, encouraged a renewal of utopian thought and in this context Jerusalem provided a ready-made symbol, understood by all. Tommaso Campanella, another visionary (this time a Dominican) from Calabria, dreamed at the beginning of the seventeenth century of a regaining of the Holy Land (*recuperatio Terrae Sanctae*) that would be the utmost expression of a historical restoration, a *renovatio saeculi*: "The Church was born in Jerusalem and it is to Jerusalem that it will return, after having conquered the whole world." He perceived the erstwhile presence of the Crusaders in Jerusalem as a step toward the instauration in that city of the messianic kingdom. Jerusalem, indeed, is the Holy City, where Jews, Christians, and Muslims can become united in communion.[44]

In the religious history of Jerusalem and of its representations, each new historical stage has perforce reflected all the previous layers. The earliest Christian attitudes toward Jerusalem reflect contemporaneous Jewish apocalypticism, while early Islamic perceptions of Jerusalem are deeply indebted to both Jewish and Christian approaches. The various religions have not only succeeded one another in presiding over the political destinies of the city. They have also developed dialectical relationships between them.

At the very core of this city and of Jewish and Christian eschatology stands the Temple Mount, the *Ḥaram al-Sharīf*. The main intention of the

preceding pages has been to reflect upon the complexity of its character and to show how this small area has also, throughout its history, been at the core of the interaction between three religious traditions. Their constant transformations of both themselves and each another have been played out, at some crucial turns in their history, through their competing visions of this same locus. The Temple Mount/*Ḥaram al-Sharīf* is indeed a pivotal point, at the intersection of cultures and religions. It may also appear, alas, as a tectonic fault line in history, as well as a *Rashomon* of sorts: to each community, it tells its own story.

[1] One of the most obvious instances of a place sacred to more than one religious tradition is that of the Babri Mosque, built at the birthplace of the god Rama in Ayodhya, in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, and destroyed in 1992 during an eruption of violence launched by Hindu fundamentalists. For another instance of a disputed place, see Robert J. Franklin and Pamela A. Bunte, "When Sacred Land is Sacred to Three Tribes: San Juan Paiute Sacred Sites and the Hopi–Navajo–Paiute Suit to Partition the Arizona Navajo Reservation," in *Sacred Sites, Sacred Places*, ed. David L. Carmichael et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 244–58.

[2] There is remarkably little literature on the history of the Temple Mount from a comparative religious perspective. For an introductory study, see Rivka Gonen, *Contested Holiness: Jewish, Muslim, and Christian Perspectives on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem* (Jersey City, N.J.: Ktav, 2003). For contemporary perspectives, see Richard D. Hecht and Roger Friedland, "The Politics of Sacred Place: Jerusalem's Temple Mount/Al-Haram Al-Sharif," in *Sacred Places and Profane Places: Essays in the Geographics of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Jamie S. Scott and Paul Simpson-Housley (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), pp. 21–61. See further J. P. Burgess, "The Sacred Site in Civil Space: Meaning and Status of the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif," *Social Identities* 10 (2004), 311–23, and Gershom Gorenberg, *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount* (New York: Free Press, 2000). See also Simon Goldhill, *The Temple of Jerusalem* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 16: "The history of the Temple is a history of clashing cultures."

[3] On the formation of the early Christian *imaginaire* of the Temple Mount, see Yaron Z. Eliav, *God's Mountain: The Temple Mount in Time, Place, and Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005). On the Christian translation of sacred space in Jerusalem, see Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), ch. 4: "To Replace," pp. 74–95 and notes, pp. 154–70. On the creation of Christian holy space, see Robert A. Markus, "How on Earth Would Places Become Holy? Origins of the Christian Idea of Holy Space," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2 (1994), 257–71. See further Jules Lebreton, "Sacred Space," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 12 (New York and London: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 526–35.

[4] See in particular Stefan Heid, *Chiliasmus und Antichrist-Mythos: Eine frühchristliche Kontroverse um das Heilige Land*, Hereditas. Studien zur Alten Kirchengeschichte, 6 (Bonn: Borengässer, 1993). For an excellent collection of texts, see Gian Luca Potestà and Marco Rizzi, *L'Anticristo*, vol. I: *Il nemico dei tempi finali: Testi dal II al IV secolo* (Milan: Mondadori, 2005).

[5] See William Horbury, "Antichrist among Jews and Gentiles," in *Jews in a Graeco-Roman World*, ed. Martin Goodman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 113–33; Oded Irshai, "Dating the Eschaton: Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic Calculations in Late Antiquity," in

Apocalyptic Time, ed. Albert I. Baumgarten, Numen Book Series. Studies in the History of Religions, 86 (Leiden and Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2000), pp. 113–55.

[6] See Hugh Nibley, "Christian Envy of the Temple," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 50 (1959), 97–123, 229–40.

[7] See the new editions of two important works of Halbwachs, *La Mémoire collective*, ed. Gérard Namer (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997 [1950]), and *La Topographie légendaire des Évangiles en Terre Sainte*, ed. Marie Jaisson (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, CNRS, 2008 [1941]), with additional studies and documents.

[8] On these concepts, see in particular Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1992), as well as his *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2000). See further G. Storumsa, "Religious Memory between Orality and Writing," *Memory Studies* 9 (2016), forthcoming.

[9] Christoph Markschies, "Die Bedeutung Jerusalems für die Christen," forthcoming (I thank Prof. Markschies for making this rich text available to me).

[10] See for instance Manlio Simonetti, "Il millenarismo cristiano da 1 al 5 secolo," *Annali di Storia dell' Esegesi* 15 (1998), 7–20. See also Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Future Hope in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[11] Ernst Käsemann, "The Beginnings of Christian Theology," *Journal for Theology and Church* 6 (1969), 40; see further Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982).

[12] Heid, *Chiliasmus und Antichrist-Mythos*.

[13] On the representations of heavenly Jerusalem throughout Christian literature, see E. Lamirande, "Jérusalem céleste," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 7 (1972), 944–58.

[14] See A. M. Berruto, "Millenarismo e montanismo," *Annali di Storia dell' Esegesi* 15 (1998), 85–100.

[15] Eusebius, *H.E*. 5.18.2; Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Kirsopp Lake, John Ernest Leonard Oulton, and Hugh Jackson Lawlor, Loeb Classical Library (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1926), pp. 486–7.

[16] See Pierre Kovalesky, "Messianisme et millénarisme russes," *Archives de sociologie des religions* 5 (1958), 47–70.

[17] On Montanist conceptions of the heavenly Jerusalem, see Pierre de Labriolle, *La Crise montaniste*. (Paris: Leroux, 1913), pp. 86–95, 330–2. See further Christine Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority, and the New Prophecy* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 15–26.

[18] See for instance Marilyn Heldman, "Legends of Lâlibalâ: The Development of an Ethiopian Pilgrimage Site," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 27 (1995), 25–38.

[19] For the meaning of "the heavenly Jerusalem" in the thought of Emmanuel Swedenborg, see for instance, his *The True Christian Religion* (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1963), sec. 782. The *Book of Mormon* offers another self-understanding of a modern religious movement issuing from Protestant Christianity as "the New Jerusalem."

[20] Rabbinic texts also deal with the heavenly Jerusalem; see for instance Bablylonian Talmud, *Ta'anit* 5a.

[21] *Strom.* 172.2ff. This text is quoted by Karl L. Schmidt, "Jerusalem als Urbild und Abbild," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 18 (1950), 207–48.; the quotation is on p. 239.

[22] For a discussion of Clement's attitude, see Klaus Thraede, "Jerusalem II (Sinnbild)," *Reallexikon f?r Antike und Christentum* 17 (1995), 718–64, esp. 729–31.

[23] *Hom. in Ier.* 9, on Jer. 11.2; *Com. in Ioh.* 10.18: "It is Jesus, God's logos, which enters into the soul, called Jerusalem." See also the triple allegorical interpretation of Jerusalem by the fourth-century Origenist, Didymos the Blind, in his *Commentary on Zacharias*, quoted by Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: les quatre sens de l'Écriture*, 4 vols in 2 (Paris: Aubier, 1959), vol. 1, tome 2, p. 645. See also O. Rousseau, "Quelques textes patristiques sur la Jérusalem céleste," *La Vie Spirituelle* 85 (1952), 378–88.

[24] Medieval references in Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, tome 2, p. 646.

[25] "Caelestis Hierusalem, quae est mater libertatis, chorus libertatis": this is a leitmotif of medieval Latin Christian literature. See for instance Godefroy of Saint Victor, *Glossa in Ex.*, 20.2, quoted by Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, tome 2, p. 646.

[26] See Thraede, "Jerusalem II (Sinnbild)."

[27] Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 93.24.

[28] See Johannes van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon: A Study into Augustine's* City of God *and the Sources of His Doctrine of the Two Cities* (Leiden and New York: E. J. Brill, 1991). For the *Fortleben* of the idea, see Étienne Gilson, *Les Métamorphoses de la cité de Dieu* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2005). Perhaps the most interesting of Augustine's elaborations on Jerusalem occur in his *Commentaries on the Psalms*. Commenting on Ps. 64.2, for example, Augustine refers to the respective etymologies of Babylon and Jerusalem—the one meaning confusion (Heb. *bilbul*); the other, vision of peace. Although these two opposing entities are inextricably mixed throughout history, Jerusalem eternally represents the love of God, while Babylon signifies the love of the world (cf. Eusebius, *Demonstratio Evangelica* IV, *in fine*). Hence, the criterion for recognizing one's own identity: Ask yourself what you love, and you'll know where you belong. Such an understanding of Jerusalem rules out localization: Jerusalem is everywhere, or more precisely, in the hearts of those who love God.

[29] See Martine Dulaey, *Victorin de Poetovio, premier exégète latin*, 2 vols (Paris: Institut d'études augustiniennes, 1993), esp. vol. 1, pp. 208–19, 255–70.

[30] Cf. ch. 7 "God's Rule in Late Antiquity" above. Similarly, the *Disputatio Gregentii*, a text from the mid-seventh century, states that the church of the Anastasis is the new Temple, while the Temple Mount itself remains razed. This seems to reflect the renewed fear of the Christians that the Jews might rebuild their Temple, perhaps through the medium of the Saracens.

[31] Cf. ch. 2 "Patterns of Rationalization" and ch. 3 "False Prophets of Early Christianity" above.

[32] See for instance John of Damascus, *De haeresibus*, 101. See further Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1997). Cf. ch. 4 "False Prophet and False Messiah" above.

[33] See for instance Averil Cameron, “The Trophies of Damascus: the Church, the Temple and Sacred Space,” in *Le Temple lieu de conflit: Actes du colloque de Cartigny, 1991, Centre d’étude du Proche-Orient ancient (CEOPA), Université de Genève.* (Leuven: Peeters, 1994), pp. 203–12, and Günter Stemberger, “Jerusalem in the Early Seventh Century: Hopes and Aspirations of Christians and Jews,” in *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Lee I. Levine (New York: Continuum, 1999), pp. 260–70.

[34] On this, see Andreas Kaplony, “635/638–1099: The Mosque of Jerusalem (Masjid Bayt al-Maqdis),” in *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Jerusalem’s Sacred Esplanade*, ed. Oleg Grabar and B. Z. Kedar (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press; Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), pp. 100–31 and 396–8, referred to in ch. 4 “False Prophet and False Messiah”, n. 38.

[35] See *Adv. haer.* 5. 25–30.

[36] See Horbury, “Antichrist among Jews and Gentiles.”

[37] See ch. 4 “False Prophet and False Messiah” for details.

[38] Sebeos, *History*, trans. R. Badrosian (New York: Sources of the Armenian Tradition, 1985), ch. 31. See ch. 4 “False Prophet and False Messiah” for further discussion of this point.

[39] On the wide circulation of the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* in the Western Middle Ages, see Hannes Möhring, *Der Weltkaiser der Endzeit: Entstehung, Wandel und Wirkung einer tausendjährigen Weissagung* (Stuttgart: Thorbecke, 2000), esp. pp. 54–104.

[40] See Guy G. Stroumsa, *Barbarian Philosophy: The Religious Revolution of Early Christianity*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 112 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), pp. 294–314.

[41] As pointed out by Marjorie Reeves and Beatrice Hirsch-Reich in their magisterial study, *The “Figurae” of Joachim of Fiore* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 184–91.

[42] See for instance Haymon of Auxerre: “Jerusalem quae interpretatur visio pacis, significat sanctam Ecclesiam Deum mente videntem.”

[43] Nicolaus Cusanus, *De pace fidei*, XIX. With the dawn of modern times, such “interfaith dialogues,” or rather “polylogues,” have become more common. The most famous example of the genre, perhaps, is Jean Bodin’s *Heptahemeres*.

[44] Alphonse Dupront, *Du sacré: Croisades et pèlerinages, images et langages* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), pp. 301–3. Benjamin Z. Kedar reminds me that the idea appears already in Guibert of Nogent’s version of Urban II’s Clermont Address.

10

Barbarians or Heretics?

On first sight, a comparison between the respective perceptions of Jews and Arabs in the Christianized Eastern Roman Empire may appear to lack real intellectual justification. There seems to be little in common between Jews and Arabs in late antiquity. The linguistic similarities between Hebrew and Arabic would not be discovered (and the category of Semitic languages would not be invented) before Leibniz, in the seventeenth century. The Jews shared the Bible (more precisely, the books of the Old Testament) with the Christians, while the Arabs, usually perceived as utter barbarians, nomads stemming from the desert, had very little in common with the Christians. I shall deal here with perceptions both before and after the battle of Yarmuk and the Islamic conquest of Jerusalem (in 636 and 638 respectively), which provided, of course, the main watershed in Byzantine attitudes to Arabs.

As we saw in Chapter 4, the ecclesiastical historian Sozomen (born *c*.400 in Bethelia, near Gaza), tells us about various Judaizing practices, such as circumcision and a prohibition on eating pork, among the *Sarakēnoi*. The origin of such practices, he adds, would come from the recognition of their kinship with the Jews, through their common ancestor Abraham.[1] As shown by Fergus Millar, such a new image of the Arabs in late antiquity stemmed from Josephus's perception of the Ishmaelites.[2]

I

Let us note right away the profound difference that exists between the modern study of Jews and Arabs in Antiquity. Ethnic and religious identity, which was relatively weak among the Syrians, for example, was very pronounced among the Jews, who made a point of preserving their national identity in a cosmopolitan world, despite the loss, in the first century, of all political power and the destruction of the central symbol of their religion. In addition, research on the Jews is far more advanced than that on pre-Islamic Arabs or Christians, who unfortunately have stirred too little interest so far. What justifies a comparison between the perception of Jews and Arabs is the fact that these were two groups of people who, although certainly very different from one another, shared the common character, from the seventh century on, of being neither Christians nor polytheists.

As I hope we shall see, the juxtaposition of late antique and early Byzantine attitudes to Jews and Arabs might shed light on some fundamental ambiguities in early Byzantine consciousness and on the semantic evolution of a few major concepts through which identity, both ethnic and religious, was defined. More precisely, I shall seek to understand a little better the ways in which the concepts of “heresy” and “barbarism” played a role in the perception of both Jews and Arabs. My purpose here is to try to take apart the mechanisms, or at least some of them, which determined how outsiders were perceived in the Christianized Roman world. It is, I think, partly because of the very fact of the remarkable linguistic continuity of the Byzantine Empire that certain major transformations of collective identity, and hence of the perceptions of “the other” (*l’autre*), remain concealed and need to be unveiled. James Howard-Johnston has rightly noted that we should never underestimate ideological inertia in the life of states and nations. More precisely, he insists on the fact that the Byzantines did not only consider themselves to be the inheritors of the Roman Empire: they thought of themselves as Romans.[3] This is also what they were called in other languages, a fact reflected in both Arabic and Hebrew sources. In the same volume, Cyril Mango calls attention to the Byzantine perception of the various Christian heresies as reflecting Satan’s many manipulations, adding that the Empire considered its principal task to

be the guardianship of correct ideology.[4] Both are right, of course, and the Byzantines were that oxymoron: Romans enrolled in a cosmic fight against the devil. Évelyne Patlagean was quite aware of this oxymoron. In her own words, "the accent is put on Christianity, as the carrier of the universal values of *Romanitas*."[5] If ideological inertia can go hand in hand with radical transformations, the major concepts with which the Byzantines both identified themselves and perceived outsiders could become quite inadequate for dealing with a changed reality, as Mango argued long ago. In this regard, following the sociologist Ann Swidler, I propose to see in the major concepts with which ethnic and religious identities are built and perceived repertoires of sorts, or "toolkits" of habits, skills, and styles from which strategies of action are constructed.[6] Societies, just like individuals, make use of the cultural tools they inherit, but these are not always entirely adequate for the new tasks expected of them in changing conditions. In such conditions, tensions, ambivalences, and contradictions develop. In the case of the Christianized Roman Empire, as we shall see, the problem is compounded by the fact that both as Romans and as Christians, the Byzantines retained sets of quite different concepts. They did not keep these sets of "toolkits" separate, but used them together, creating new, complex categories, which we will try to deconstruct. The situation is even more complicated: while the Byzantines were politically and culturally Romans, religiously they were Hebrews (in their own mind they were, actually, the real Hebrews, *verus Israel*, as they alone correctly understood the scriptures and prophecies). And, of course, linguistically, they were Greeks, a fact at once trivial and highly problematic, as "*Hellēn*," for Christians, referred to pagans, polytheists.

From the earliest times on, the twin terms *Hellēn/barbaros* had continually undergone semantic shifts of various kinds, a fact well studied in the *longue durée* by Albrecht Dihle.[7] As far back as the earliest social groups, collective identity had always been represented in terms of a dichotomy between the self and the other. From Hellenistic times onward, contacts between the ethnicities, cultures, and religions of the Mediterranean and Near East became so complex that there ensued a series of transformations, sometimes radical, of the key concepts in ethnological designations.

Before we discuss early Byzantine ethnological categories, we must go back to earlier strata of Christian literature and to the formative period

where these categories were first established, a time when Christians were still outlawed, if not persecuted, and long before they became proud Romans. The scriptural foundation upon which Christian ethnological categories were constructed was without a doubt Colossians 3: 11: "Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all."[8] Thus, from the very outset Christians inherited Jewish categories, even though they rejected them: for the Jews, humanity was divided into Jews and non-Jews (*goyyim* [peoples] in Hebrew, translated as *ethnē* in the LXX). For the Jews of the Hellenistic world, these *ethnē* were the Greeks, *Hellēnes*, a word which became equivalent to pagans.[9] Hence, there existed for the early Christians a double distinction, the Greek one between *Hellēnes* and *barbaroi*, on the one hand, and the Jewish one, between *Hellēnes* and *Ioudaioi*, on the other. Moreover, as followers of the Law of Moses, a text originally redacted in Hebrew, even Hellenophone Jews considered themselves, and were regarded by the Greeks, as followers of a *philosophia barbaros* (a wisdom written down in a foreign language, as Clement of Alexandria, following Philo, termed the Torah).[10]

In an early study of early Christian ethnological representations, I asked how Christian intellectuals in late antiquity perceived the different peoples with whom they were in contact, and whether they succeeded in establishing their own ethnological categories, distinct from those they had inherited from the Hellenistic and Roman worlds.[11] The only answer I reached in regard to this question was disappointing. Admittedly, Christianity was conceived and presented, from its earliest beginnings, as a new truth open to all peoples and translatable into any language, accessible to all cultures. However, it would only be with the Spanish *frailes*, missionaries to the New World at the start of the modern era, that a truly ethnological approach, in the vein of Herodotus, a real effort to understand cultures in their own terms, would come to light.[12] It seems that the very ecumenical ambitions of the Christians blunted or even neutralized their ability to develop a real ethnological curiosity and to discern the distinctive qualities of the various peoples. After all, these peoples had all been, before their conversion, pagans. And paganism, in its many garbs, was of no intellectual interest whatsoever, as it was established upon falsehood. The same truth had been offered to all. Religious truth, the saving incarnation of God's Son, was the only thing that mattered. Truth remained one, while

multiplicity was a sign of error. Yet, it would seem that the early Christian thinkers, followers of a "barbarian philosophy," should have developed at least a tacit sympathy for the barbarian nations outside the Hellenic cultural realm. Certainly until the fourth century, some Christian authors, at least, saw themselves both as followers of a "barbarian philosophy" and as being ethnic "barbarians." Thus Tatian, in his *Address to the Greeks*, written towards the middle of the second century, proudly presents himself as an "Assyrian." As such, he perceives himself as a barbarian *in bonam partem*, who rejects the false wisdom of the Greeks, while possessing a better, "barbarian" kind of wisdom. In a similar vein, Rufinus, at the very start of his *Ecclesiastical History* (a text written in the late fourth century) proudly describes how Christianity was introduced to the Armenians, the Ethiopians, the Iberians (or Georgians), and the Saracens (or Arabs), in compliance with the evangelical injunction: "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation."[13]

Indeed, Christians, even in the Christianized Roman Empire, while politically and culturally Romans, retained some "barbarian" traits in their identity. First, they were heirs to the Jews and thus guardians of that barbarian wisdom par excellence, the Bible, a book written in Hebrew, even if read in Greek translation. And what a translation! The Greek of the Septuagint cannot, any more than that of the New Testament, be seriously considered as the polished, elegant, even sublime language one expects of a book of wisdom, especially one that claims to have been divinely revealed. Early Christian writers proudly accepted the charge leveled at them by pagan writers, such as Celsus, of being simplistic, of lacking intellectual sophistication. The very linguistic rusticity of the Christian scriptures answered the accusation: if these were written in a language of fishermen, it was precisely because they were intended to bring salvation to all in equal measure, illiterates and philosophers alike. Thus Christians, aware of being marginalized by the intellectual elites, accepted this fact, identifying with a wisdom that was foreign to that of the Greek philosophers, and was therefore barbarian.

The absolute legitimacy of translating the scriptures became a tenet and fact of Christianity (though not of the other two Abrahamic religions), and is thus part of the legacy of early Christianity. All is translatable: divine revelation is entirely within the realm of prose, not of poetry, as the Greeks would have it. For Christians, it was the Greek philosophers, the old pagan

elites, who had to be discredited and toppled from their pedestals by the followers of the new barbarian philosophy. But the issue was more complicated, as Christians were not simply another barbarian people. They lived among Greeks and barbarians alike, without quite belonging to them. Christians, therefore, were not like any other people. They represented a people of another order, between Greeks and Jews, a third kind of people famously called in the *Epistle to Diognetus*, in the second century, *triton genos* (*tertium genus*). The Syriac theologian Aphrahat, often called "the Persian Sage," would speak, in the fourth century, of *'ama de-'amame*, a people issued of peoples. Despite both their vituperative argument with the Jews and their ecumenism, Christians refused to relinquish the historical, geographical, and ethnic roots of their religion, and insisted on seeing themselves as the legitimate successors to Israel: *verus Israel*.[14] Constantinople, therefore, would be the new Jerusalem as much as the new Rome. Only the Manichaeans would bring to its radical consequences the Marcionite tendency to give up completely on the Jewish dimension of Christian identity.

II

In the fourth century, "pagan" intellectuals, realizing the balance of power had shifted in a dramatic fashion, learned to recognize the virtues of religious pluralism and developed new arguments in favour of religious toleration. Symmachus, in his *Relation* 8, puts it thus:

> Everyone has his own custom and his own rite; the divine mind has allotted a variety of religions to the city as its guardians. As different souls are distributed to the newborn, so are different spirits of destiny to each people.[15]

Of particular import, in this context, is what one might call the privatization of religion. With the growing numbers of conversions to Christianity, it was inevitable that pluralism would become established in the Empire. At issue was a new reality that had to be recognized. Themistius, another great pagan intellectual of the generation of Emperor Julian, proposes a division into three ethnic groups, or rather, three cultural and religious domains: Greece, homeland of polytheistic Hellenism; Syria, homeland of the Jews and thus also representing the Christians; and Egypt, symbolic homeland of the mystical religions.[16] As Gilbert Dagron notes in an important study, "the assimilation of major religious concepts into the major provinces of the empire has a … philosophical significance: it reduces the problem of rival religions to a problem of vicinity and concurrent civilizations."[17]

An analogous tripartition is found in Eusebius, between Phoenicians, Egyptians, and Hellenes.[18] With Themistius, the Syrians (alias the Christians) have replaced the Phoenicians: ethnic division has taken on a religious coloration. Indeed, Jews were often regarded by Greek philosophers (such as Porphyry, for instance, who reflects a long tradition) as having been the Syrians' intellectual and religious elite, their philosophers (just as the Brahmins represented the Indian elite). We should note the importance, in such a context, of the fact that Christianity, like Judaism, was regarded as stemming from the East.

For our purpose, it is important to observe the new manner in which relations between ethnic and religious identities were formulated in the Byzantine Empire.[19] From the fourth century and at least up to the eleventh, when Byzantine military victories led to the absorption of sizable Muslim

populations into the empire, there was an approximate equivalence between religious and political identity; until that time it was not possible to be Roman without being Christian. For the first Byzantines were also Romans —"Romans of old stock," *katharoi Rōmaioi*—who were directly concerned with the welfare of the Empire. And they knew the barbarians were at the gates: the Huns, sowing panic in the Near East at the beginning of the fifth century; later the Bulgars and the Slavs from the Balkans, and, above all, the Muslims—Arabs at first, and then, from the eleventh century, Turks. These were long-term confrontations that would be indelibly imprinted on Byzantine consciousness. As Hélène Ahrweiler has shown, the blend of fear and contempt that the barbarian nomads provoked among the Byzantines resonated as the very definition of "quintessential cultural alterity."[20] The Byzantines, who saw themselves as both the chosen people and as the *Kulturvolk* par excellence, drew a radical distinction between Christians and non-Christians. In this context two interesting and related concepts may be noted: *mixobarbaros*, semi-barbarian, and *mixellēn*, semi-pagan. These curious terms, found in the eleventh century on the Balkan borders in particular, were already in existence in late antiquity. Dioscoros, for instance, in the sixth century, refers to a strange person living on the margins of the known world, mixing with pagans, but also representing a *Naturvolk* (i.e., a "primitive" people, ignorant of culture), though his purpose is to convert them to Christianity.[21] The Byzantines, however, like the Greeks and Romans before them, knew how to distinguish—in the case of peoples foreign to their cultural universe—between *Naturvölker* and *Kulturvölker*. From ancient times, the cultural links between the Greeks and the peoples of the Near East had given rise to a long tradition of attraction to the peoples of the East and their "barbarian" wisdom. Thus Indians, for example, though not Arabs, were perceived as a *Kulturvolk*, with a cultural tradition deemed to be rich, even though there was virtually no knowledge of its substance and the books in which this wisdom was expressed could not be read. Moreover, it seems that the Christian perception of Indians and their culture was not much different from the views found in Greek and Latin pagan texts.[22]

Let us summarize what we have uncovered so far about the complex interface between the two highly different ethnological taxonomies through which Christians perceived identity. The superposition of these taxonomies

in early Byzantium meant that, for Christianized Romans, the concept of "barbarian" had connotations that were distinctly negative politically and culturally, but positive with respect to religion.

As believers in Jesus Christ, they confronted the Jews.

As [the true] Israel, they confronted the pagans, or *hellēnes*.

As followers of a 'barbarian wisdom', they confronted the Greeks.

As Romans, they confronted the barbarians.

Barbaros was originally a linguistic term that Hellenistic Jews, and subsequently Christians, had used for their self-representation. We have seen how it retained its original meaning in Byzantium, while, side-by-side with its Christian, positive meaning, it also referred to pagan peoples beyond the confines of the Empire. From the fourth to the seventh centuries, the Christianization of the Arabs, both in Syrian towns and among the tribes, seems to have curtailed any ethnological interest in them. Although they remained marginal on account of their language and culture, they underwent a process of integration into the Empire and the Arab kingdoms, whether or not Christian, functioned as "buffer" territories vis-à-vis the Sasanian enemy.

The Byzantine Empire, then, defined itself through Christian Orthodoxy, which entailed the rejection of religious factions which did not receive imperial support, such as Arians and Monophysites, as heretics. Heresy was forbidden by imperial decree, just like the cult of pagan gods, a fact reflected, in particular, in book xvi of the Theodosian Code.[23] If the followers of the Monophysite Churches were not actively harried, it was above all because there was no way of eradicating a Christian movement that dominated a good part of the Near East. It has been suggested—a hypothesis that cannot be demonstrated, but which is by no means absurd—that the Byzantines were relieved when the Arabs conquered a good part of the imperial territories in the seventh century and that, to some extent, they even welcomed the conquest.[24] From the end of the fourth century, and more markedly from the time of Justinian on, the Jews lost many of their civil rights and became marginalized in a society that defined itself as Christian. Yet, they preserved the right to an existence that, although precarious, was a recognized fact. It should be emphasized that the Jews were the only legally sanctioned religious minority in the Empire. Indeed, under Justinian unity of worship made unity of the Empire a direct function

of religious unity, a fact which enabled the emperor to turn religious heresy into political contamination.[25] In practice, Justinian's religious policy compelled the Jews to define themselves as a community along the lines of the Christian orthodox model.

III

Justinian's proclamation, in February 553, of his Novella 146, *peri Hebraiōn*, is very revealing here: on the pretext of a disagreement among the Jews over the legitimacy of the ritual reading of the Bible in translation in the synagogue cult, he decided to involve himself directly in the argument and ruling over permitted and forbidden synagogue ritual.[26] He encouraged the Jews to read the Bible in their synagogues, not only in Hebrew, but also in translation, be it in Greek, Latin, or another vernacular (when in Greek, the only version authorized by the Novella is the LXX, which was inspired), and prohibited the study of the Mishnah (*deuterōsis*). Justinian's famous ruling, which has been analyzed from a number of viewpoints, certainly reflects the Byzantines' sense of cultural superiority, which made them scorn barbarian languages and ignore them. In this, they were the cultural heirs of the Greeks.[27] This scorn and ignorance they applied to the Élanguage of the revealed Bible.

Thus, the Byzantine millennium did not, to my knowledge, produce a single Hebraist, no one like Jerome, defender of *hebraica veritas*.[28] By encouraging the Jews to forgo the sole use of Hebrew in reading the Holy Scriptures, imperial power sought to deprive them of both their own identity and the major linguistic "advantage" they had over Christians, as they alone could read the Bible in the original text. As Leonard Rutgers puts it, "Justinian realized full well that their access to Hebrew gave the Jews power."[29] By forbidding them the study of the Mishnah, moreover, he was going even further in seeking to strip them of their own interpretation of scripture. In a sense, he thus sought to leave them no alternative to eventually accepting the Christian interpretation of scripture. As mentioned in Chapter 1, it is no mere chance that the redaction of the Mishnah, in the last decades of the second century, strictly parallels the first mentions (by Irenaeus) of the corpus which we call the New Testament. Throughout the second century, both Jews and Christians, in a series of battles over self-definition, had confronted the pagans, their own different interpretations, which would soon become "heresies," and one another. In a sense, one can speak of a race between the two communities, throughout the century, to find the correct hermeneutical key for the correct understanding of

scripture. Both the New Testament and the Mishnah gradually became the proposed keys: either the prophecies of the Hebrew Bible were announcing the coming of the Messiah, or they were to be understood as the Law of Israel, to be interpreted through the rabbinic authorities. By forbidding Jews to study the Mishnah, Justinian was stripping them of their own religious autonomy and transforming them, as it were, into a heterodox or heretical Christian community. He thus clearly stated the hope that reading the prophetic texts that announced the coming of Christ might eventually lead Jews to convert. All the same, if the Jews were becoming Christian heretics of sorts, they remained privileged heretics, since they still had the right to an existence, albeit constrained by various impositions, and sometimes by persecution. I should like to add that by defining a tolerated, though inferior status for the Jews, Justinian laid the foundation for the Islamic attitude to non-Muslim monotheists—"peoples of the Book" (sing. *ahl al-kitāb*), as the Qu'ran calls them, a term that would soon include Zoroastrians alongside Jews and Christians—as legitimate but subordinate minorities, or *dhimmis*, under Muslim sovereignty. As we saw in Chapter 6, the Islamic concept of the *dhimmi* can be found *in nuce* in Justinian's attitude to the Jews. The Muslim conquerors of the Near Eastern Byzantine provinces would only need to broaden its use to Christians as well.

The Byzantine transformation of Judaism into a kind of Christian heresy, which strikes us as paradoxical, made sense internally. For early Christian thinkers, the history of Christianity (and of heresy) started with humanity, rather than with the Incarnation. *Anima naturaliter christiana*, "The soul is by nature Christian," wrote Tertullian even before the end of the second century. Indeed, from the very beginnings of humanity, Christianity had represented the only authentic and legitimate religious position.[30] This idea, launched by Paul (Rom. 1: 18–23), had been echoed by Eusebius in the fourth century. Christian thinkers remained unable to conceive of a monotheism shared by a number of different, legitimate religions. Since Christianity was *verus Israel*, *vetus Israel* represented a perversion of Christian truth and was, in a way, a heresy.

IV

Yuhanna ibn Mansur, alias John of Damascus, was the son of a high-ranking official of the Abbasid caliphate and died around the middle of the fifth century in the monastery of Mar Sabas, in the Judean wilderness. He was the last of the great Greek patristic authors, and is the first Christian writer to mention Islam, at the end of his work on heresies. The work begins thus, following the structure of universal history: “The forbears and archetypes of all heresies are four in number: 1. Barbarism, 2. Scythianism, 3. Hellenism, 4. Judaism. It is from these four that all the others proceed.” John received this particular perspective from the patristic tradition of heresiography, notably its best-known work, Epiphanius’s *Panarion*. Barbarism prevailed from Adam to Noah, while from Noah to the Tower of Babel it was Scythianism; Hellenism was born of the idolatry prevalent at the time of Serug, while Judaism dated from the circumcision of Abraham. John’s conception of heresy retains some of the features already apparent in Flavius Josephus, which referred to political factions as much as to religious attitudes. John, who took a particular interest in Hellenism, cites Colossians 3: 11 as the direct source of his taxonomy.[31] Three of the prototypes of heresy mentioned by John thus demarcate the major successive stages in the religious history of humanity. Barbarism, Scythianism, Hellenism—these were historical categories belonging to the past. Only Judaism was still alive, representing, one might say (to use Arnold Toynbee’s phrase), a fossilized religion in a Christianized world.

For John of Damascus, nascent Islam represented another kind of heresy, the most recent to have “appeared in our time,” heralded by a false prophet who in his preaching claimed to have received from heaven a book of divine revelation. This false prophet was spreading his shameless lies among barbarians who were still polytheists a short while ago. “These dogs of Ishmael, this barbarian stock that delights in murder,” he calls the Arabs. In moving from *Jāhiliyya* (the period of “ignorance”) to Islam, according to Islamic historiography, the Arabs switched from barbarism, associated with paganism, to monotheism.[32] Other Greek testimonies on the Arabs that have reached us from the seventh century accord with this attitude. In his Christmas sermon of 734, Sophronius of Jerusalem expresses his fear of the

Saracens, referring to the fact that the conquering army prevents Christians from walking from the Holy City to Bethlehem. For his part, Maximus the Confessor (who died in 662) describes the Arabs as a barbarian people coming from the desert to ravage civilized regions like wild beasts. For him they were the instrument of divine punishment inflicted upon the Christian empire for its sins.[33] A similar picture of the Arabs is found in the *Narrationes* of Pseudo-Nilus (a text difficult to date accurately): the pre-Islamic Arabs live like ferocious animals, eat flesh, and cannot even be called idolaters since they have no gods whatsoever. For our Christian authors, monotheism was identical to Christianity (or to Judaism, i.e., incomplete Christianity). Hence, Islamized Arabs, whose strict monotheism could not be denied, would now be perceived, like the Jews, as heretics. This perception was held together with their old image as barbarian nomads from the desert, which would be very slow to disappear. One might add here that those Arab tribes which had converted to Christianity before the seventh century were often considered to have heretic proclivities.

After the initial shock of the seventh and eighth centuries, the Byzantines would acclimatize to the Arab–Muslim enemy, as they had gotten used to the continued existence of the Jews, an existence that remained, however, a theological outrage.[34] It was a conflict that would set the scene for centuries. Elizabeth Jeffreys has clearly noted the two opposite strands in Byzantine attitudes to the Arabs.[35] One would even sometimes tolerate the enemy and, in rare instances, respect him. Byzantium would also have its humanists who would recognize the political, as opposed to religious, nature of the conflict and would acknowledge the respect due to the other, the Muslim. Thus, in the second half of the tenth century, for instance, Patriarch Polyeuktos rejected the demand by Emperor Nikephoros Phokas that soldiers killed in battle against the Muslims be regarded as martyrs: those whose occupation it was to spill blood should not be thus sanctified.[36]

As for the Jews, Byzantine theologians would continue to consider them as abettors of heresy, thanks to their magical gifts and their privileged connections with the devil. Moreover, there is a tantalizing possibility that certain heresies, notably in Phrygia—for example, that of the Athinganoi (“untouchables”) of the ninth century—were close in origin to Judeo-

Christian groups, groups which do not seem to have completely withered away in the Christianized Roman Empire. But that is another story.[37]

Through some rather loose-knit observations, I have sought here to reflect upon certain shifts in the key concepts employed by one society to perceive others. These shifts were fuelled by the existence of not one, but at least two sets of ethnological taxonomies in the early Byzantines' "toolkit." Whereas Christianized Rome transformed the concept of barbarian through its own ambivalence to it, Romanized Christianity expanded the concept of heresy, as it could not conceive of a non-Christian monotheistic religion. Hence, the Byzantines (like so many other societies, past and present) were unable to develop a lucid understanding of both Jews and Arabs. For them, Jews and Arabs retained an unstable status, at once barbarians and heretics, ever on the limes. This status, indeed, did not represent a category error. But, it reflected a discomfort with Judaism as well as with Islam, a discomfort deeply ingrained in Christianized *Romanitas*.

[1] Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, II.4 and VI.38. On this festival, see ch. 8 "Jewish-Christians and Islamic Origins" above, n. 57.

[2] See, for example, Fergus Millar, "Empire, Community, and Culture in the Roman Near East: Greeks, Syrians, Jews and Arabs," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 38 (1987), 143–64.

[3] James Howard-Johnston, "Byzantium and Its Neighbors," in *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys, John F. Haldon, and Robin Cormack (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 939–56 (p. 952). On the Byzantines' perception of the Romans, see Robert Browning, "Greek and Others: From Antiquity to the Renaissance," in *Greeks and Barbarians*, ed. Thomas Harrison (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 257–77.

[4] Cyril A. Mango, "Byzantium's Role in World History," in *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys, John F. Haldon, and Robin Cormack (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 957–61 (p. 957).

[5] See Évelyne Patlagean, "Byzance, le barbare, l'hérétique, et la loi universelle," in *Ni juif, ni grec: Entretiens sur le racisme*, ed. L. Poliakov (Paris: Mouton, 1978), pp. 81–90. Republished in Évelyne Patlagean, *Structure sociale, famille, chrétienté à Byzance: IV.–XI. siècle* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1981).

[6] See in particular Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986), 273–86.

[7] For a diachronic study of this long span, see Albrecht Dihle, *Die Griechen und die Fremden* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1994); *Greeks and Barbarians*, ed. Thomas Harrison (New York: Routledge, 2002).

[8] Cf. Gal. 6: 15 and Gal. 3: 28, which include the elimination of the categories "man" and "woman."

[9] It should be noted, however, that the Greeks were also differentiated from the *ethnēi* in classical literature. See, for example, Aristotle, *Politics* VII.2.3 (1324b10).

[10] *Strom*. 2.2.5, 5.9.57, 5.14.93.

[11] Guy G. Stroumsa, "Philosophy of the Barbarians: On Early Christian Ethnological Representations," in *Geschichte, Tradition, Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Hubert Cancik, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Peter Schäfer (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1996), vol. 2, pp. 339–68; reprinted in Guy G. Stroumsa, *Barbarian Philosophy: The Religious Revolution of Early Christianity*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 112 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), pp. 54–84.

[12] See, for example, Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Carmen Bernand and Serge Gruzinski, *De l'idolâtrie: Une archéologie des sciences religieuses* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1988); Francisco Javier Gómez Díez, *El impacto de las religiones indígenas americanas en la teología misionera del s. XVI* (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 2000).

[13] Mark 16: 15; cf. Matt. 28:18–20.

[14] On this theme, the seminal book by Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: Étude sur les relations entre juifs et chrétiens dans l'empire romain (135–425)* (Paris 1964 [1948]), remains unsurpassed.

[15] This text is quoted and discussed in M. Edwards, "Romanitas and the Church of Rome," in *Approaching Late Antiquity: The Transformation from Early to Late Empire*, ed. Simon Swain and Mark Edwards (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 187–210, esp. 207. See Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, *Prefect and Emperor: The Relationes of Symmachus, A.D. 384*, trans. R. H. Barrow (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973). On the dialectic of pagan and Christian attitudes, see A. H. Armstrong, "The Way and the Ways: Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in the Fourth Century A.D.," *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984), 1–17.

[16] Themistius, *Orationes*, ed. Heinrich Schenkl and Glanville Downey (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1965), pp. 102–3.

[17] Gilbert Dagron, "L'Empire romain d'orient au IVe siècle et les traditions politiques de l'hellénisme: Le témoignage de Thémistios," in *Travaux et Mémoires*, 3 (Paris: de Boccard, 1968), pp. 149–86, on p. 156.

[18] Eus. *P.E.* I; *Laud. Const.* 13.1.

[19] On this issue, compare the approach taken by Cyril Mango, who argues that the Byzantines could only express themselves using the terminology of classical literature, with that of Alexander Kazhdan. See Cyril A. Mango, *Byzantine Literature as a Distorting Mirror* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); A. P. Kazhdan, "Ethnology," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 744.

[20] Hélène Ahrweiler, "Byzantine Concepts of the Foreigner: The Case of the Nomads," in *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire*, ed. Hélène Ahrweiler and Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1998), pp. 1–15, esp. p. 12. On the concept of the barbarian in late antiquity, see P. Heather, "The Barbarian in Late Antiquity: Image, Reality, and Transformation," in *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity*, ed. Richard Miles (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 234–58.

[21] For an analysis of this puzzling text, see Jitse Dijkstra, “A World Full of the Word: The Biblical Learning of Dioscorus,” in *Learned Antiquity. Scholarship and Society in the Near East, the Greco-Roman World, and the Early Medieval West*, ed. A. A. MacDonald, M. W. Twomey, and G. J. Reinink, Groningen Studies in Cultural Change, 5 (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), pp. 135–46.

[22] See Stroumsa, “Philosophy of the Barbarians”. “Cf. V. Christides, “Arabs as ‘Barbaroi’ before the Rise of Islam,’” *Byzantine Studies* 10 (1969), 315–24.

[23] On the concept of heresy in Byzantium, see, for example, J. Gouillard, “L’Hérésie dans l’empire byzantin: Des origines au XIIe siècle,” in *Travaux et Mémoires*, 1 (Paris: de Boccard, 1965), pp. 299–324; Janet Hamilton and Bernard Hamilton, *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World: c.650–c.1450* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

[24] See, for example, Yehuda D. Nevo and Judith Koren, *Crossroads to Islam: The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2003).

[25] See Nicholas de Lange, “Hebrews, Greeks or Romans? Jewish Culture and Identity in Byzantium,” in *Strangers to Themselves: The Byzantine Outsiders*, ed. Dion C. Smythe (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 105–18.

[26] Cf. ch. 6 “Religious Dynamics between Jews and Christians,” section VII above.

[27] However it seems that over time, a certain bilingualism became increasingly common among high-ranking Byzantine officials. See A. P. Kazhdan and Ann Wharton Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 183, 259–60.

[28] This total lack of curiosity regarding Hebrew might have derived in part from the Byzantines’ perception that they were *verus Israel*, as argued by M. H. Congourdeau, “Le Judaïsme, cœur de l’identité byzantine,” in *Les Chrétiens et les juifs dans le sociétés de rites grec et latin*, ed. M. Dmitriev, D. Tollet, and É. Teiro (Paris: H. Champion, 2003), pp. 17–27. But it obviously reflected a traditional Greek lack of interest in other languages.

[29] See Leonard Rutgers, “Justinian’s Novella 146, between Jews and Christians,” in *Jewish Culture and Society Under the Christian Roman Empire*, ed. Richard Lee Kalmin and Seth Schwartz, Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Culture and Religion, 3 (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), pp. 385–407.

[30] *Apol*. 17.

[31] The term *Hellēnismos*, already in use in the 6th century BC in the writings of Theagnes of Rhegium (*Testimonia*, fragment 1a), occurs in a Jewish text, 2 Maccabees 4.13. For a study of John’s attitude to Islam in its historical context, see Jean Damascène, *Écrits sur l’Islam*, trans. Raymond Le Coz (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1992). On the anti-Islamic literature of Byzantium, see Adel Théodore Khoury, *Polémique byzantine contre l’Islam (VIIIe–XIIIe s.)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972).

[32] For a discussion of some Christian perceptions of Arabs before the advent of Islam, see, for example, Daniel Caner, “Sinai Pilgrimage and Ascetic Romance: Pseudo-Nilus’ *Narrationes* in Context,” in *Travel, Communication, and Geography in Late Antiquity: Sacred and Profane*, ed. Linda Ellis and Frank Kidner (Burlington, Vt: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 135–47.

[33] Maximus the Confessor, *Letter* 14, Patrologia Graeca, 91, pp. 533–4.

[34] For the theological transformations inspired by the advent of Islam, see John F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: The Transformation of a Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), ch. 9, esp. pp. 337–48.

[35] Elizabeth Jeffreys, “The Image of the Arabs in Byzantine Literature,” in *The Seventeenth International Byzantine Congress: Major Papers* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: A. D. Caratzas, 1986), pp. 305–23.

[36] Text cited in Alain Ducellier, *Byzance et le monde orthodoxe* (Paris: A. Colin, 1986), p. 288. Gilbert Dagron, “‘Ceux d’en face’: Les peuples étrangers dans les traités militaires byzantins,” in *Travaux et Mémoires*, 10 (Paris: de Boccard, 1987), pp. 207–32. See also Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs*, Harvard Middle East Monographs, 36 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), and the survey by Maria Mavroudi in her review of El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 100 (1) (2007), pp. 202–25. On the issue of holy war, see Angeliki E. Laiou, “On Just War in Byzantium,” in *To Hellenikon: Studies in Honor of Speros Vryonis I Jr*, ed. J. S. Langdon (New Rochelle, N.Y.: A. D. Caratzas., 1993), pp. 153–77, and N. Oikonomides, “The Concept of Holy War and Two Tenth-Century Byzantine Ivories,” in *Peace and War in Byzantium: Essays in Honor of George T. Dennis*, ed Timothy S. Miller and John W. Nesbitt (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), pp. 62–86.

[37] On the Athinganoi, see Joshua Starr, “An Eastern Christian Sect: The Athinganoi,” *Harvard Theological Review*, 29 (1936), 93–106.

Envoi: Athens, Jerusalem, Mecca: *praeparatio coranica*

As we have seen from various angles in the chapters of this book, the Eastern Mediterranean witnessed, in the centuries between Jesus and Muhammad, a dramatic transformation of religion: the victory of prophetic monotheism. Together with the abandonment of animal sacrifices, the centrality of prophecy reflects what we can call the religious revolution of late antiquity. The church fathers were no simple bystanding witnesses to these transformations. To a great extent, they created them—both through their literary polemics and, as community leaders, at times, alas, permitting, supporting, or even leading violent behavior. The name of Cyril of Alexandria, here, comes easily to mind: as we know, he seems to have been directly involved in the lynching of Hypatia in 414.[1]

I

Patristic texts have been scanned, of course, for their references to pagan myths, beliefs, and rituals. From Clement of Alexandria, through figures such as Lactantius, Firmicus Maternus or Arnobius of Sicca, to Sozomen, and beyond, patristic literature remains one of our most important sources for the study of late antique paganism. In a variety of ways, as a byproduct of their virulent polemics, as it were, some of the patristic writers offer valuable insights on religious attitudes in the world of their contemporaries and on some central pagan myths and rituals. Clement, in particular, who was born a pagan in second-century Alexandria, is an unequaled source of information on various aspects of pagan religion and especially on the Greek mysteries, as well as on late Egyptian religion. What is even more remarkable, however, is his full-fledged conception of the history of religions, from the earliest antiquity—and not only of the "history of salvation," or *Heilsgeschichte*, and the history of Israel.[2] Clement shows a remarkable consciousness of Christianity inscribing itself within the general history of religions. By far the most interesting feature of the *Protrepticus* from our perspective is Clement's concise history of religion in seven stages of paganism, though these are not necessarily chronologically consecutive.[3] This highly original conception would in itself have been enough to offer Clement a place among the best historians and observers of religion in the ancient world, together with Herodotus and his contemporary Lucian.[4] In the sixth book of the *Stromateis*, Clement develops at length the theme of Greek borrowing from the Egyptians and also from the Indians. Doing so, he devotes much attention to Indian religion, and is the first author in Greek literature to refer to Buddhism.

Recent scholarship has highlighted the fact that monotheistic belief was not restricted to Jews and Christians in the Roman Empire. Pagan monotheism (the locution sounds like an oxymoron) was in fact a rather widespread phenomenon in the early centuries of the Christian era.[5] It is now becoming clearer that the traditional picture of the passage from paganism to Christianity," as a transition from polytheism to monotheism is a rather simplistic one. For many pagan intellectuals under the early Empire —and not only philosophers—as well as for a number of religious trends,

the idea of a single supreme divine power was a natural one. This does not mean, of course, that there was no major difference regarding the nature of the Divinity between such views and those of Christians. The God of Plotinus is not quite that of Origen. The fundamental differences between pagan and Christian conceptions must be sought elsewhere than in the abstract idea of monotheism.

Significant as it may be, however, scholarly focus on “pagans and Christians” may be deeply misleading as we seek to understand the religious milieu of early Christianity better. Such an approach tends to distort the perceived proportions of this environment, where enemies much closer than the pagans were prominent. Both the Jews and a number of sectarians, in particular dualists, offered much more serious challenges than the pagans to the emerging “party line,” or orthodoxy, than the “atheist” pagans. Traditional historiography usually deals with polemics against Jews, Gnostics, Manichaeans, and pagans in so many different frameworks, while the emergence of Islam, at the very end of the patristic period, is often simply ignored. Hence, in order to understand fully the contribution of patristic literature to the history of religions in late antiquity, one must study *together* the challenges offered by heretics, Jews, and pagans.

II

To a great extent, and perhaps more than is usually acknowledged, the early polemic between Christians and Jews had Abraham as one of its main focal points. The rabbis of the Talmud, in stark contradistinction to the church fathers, did not indulge very much in literary polemics against their opponents. While the patristic heresiographers spent endless efforts describing at length the odious beliefs and practices of the heretics before refuting them, the rabbis found it much more expedient simply to ignore them, thus "killing them by silence," content with vague allusions to the *minim*, a generic term for heretics of all kinds. It is, then, mainly thanks to patristic literature that we can retrieve the early career of the religious conflict between Christians and Jews about Abraham's inheritance.

Abraham was not only a main figure of contention between Jews and Christians. Various indicators point to the importance of the figure of Abraham in the Roman Empire, where he seems to have been a well-known and highly respected hero of archaic times. It is no mere chance that Emperor Alexander Severus (208–235 CE) is claimed to have possessed, together with statues of Orpheus and Apollonius of Tyana, one of Abraham (but no statue of Moses).[6] Emperor Julian himself, arguing against the Christians that, since they claim to be followers of Abraham, they should practice circumcision, adds that he himself reveres the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. [7] Marinos, Proclus's successor at the head of the Academy, was born in Neapolis in Samaria (today Nablus). According to his pupil Damascius, there was on Mount Gerizim (the Samaritans' holiest site) "the most holy shrine of Zeus Hypsistos, founded by Abraham the patriarch of the ancient Hebrews." Marinos, a Samaritan by birth, converted to paganism, as it were, as he became convinced that Samaritan beliefs had departed from Abraham's religion.[8] To be sure, these few texts provide only meager information, but they do point to a continuing presence of the figure of Abraham far beyond the Jewish and Christian communities.

"What has Athens to do with Jerusalem, or the Academy with the Church?"[9] Since Tertullian's pithy phrase, and despite it, the development of Christian theology in the Roman Empire and beyond has been symbolized by the relationship between Jerusalem and Athens. What the

great majority of the early Christian thinkers (especially, of course, those writing in either Greek or Latin) did, and to a great measure successfully, was, precisely, to build bridges between Athens and Jerusalem. Henry Chadwick once used the metaphor of the ellipse in order to describe the relationship between Jerusalem and Rome in the early Church, in order to indicate its dialectical nature.[10] The same metaphor could certainly be used to describe the circulation of ideas between the young faith in the crucified Jewish Messiah and Greco-Roman culture. To a great extent, the ellipse Athens–Jerusalem can indeed symbolize the major effort of the early Christian theologians from the days of the Apologetes to those of the Cappadocians. As the title of this book points out, I have proposed to highlight here another trajectory, of a different kind, in patristic literature: that which would eventually lead to the foundation of a new religion by the Prophet from the Hijaz.

III

Although we cannot go back to the religion of the "historical" Abraham, we know the concept of Abraham's religion well from the Qur'an: "And who has a better religion than one who submits himself to God (*aslama waǧhahu li-Illāhi*), does right and follows the true religion of Abraham the perennial believer (*millat Ibrāhīm ḥanīfan*)? God has taken Abraham for a friend (*wa-attakhadha Allāhu Ibrahīma khalīlan*)." (Qur'an 4: 125). For the Qur'an, there is only one religion of Abraham and it is Islam: "Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but a perennial believer and a Muslim (*ḥanīfan musliman*)" (Qur'an 3: 67). For the Qur'an, both Jews and Christians seek to claim that Abraham, the first true believer in God's unity, belongs only to their own respective communities, although their sacred texts, the Torah and the Gospel, are later concoctions that cannot testify about Abraham's original religion.[11]

This vision of things is very well known, of course, but I wish to call attention to the fact that it does not appear first in the Qur'an. Justin Martyr wrote his *Dialogue with Trypho*, it seems, about a decade before his death in 150, two generations after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, perceived by Christians as the divine punishment for the Jews' refusal to recognize Jesus as Messiah. Whether the text is based upon a real dialogue or not is irrelevant here. Justin Martyr complains about Jewish accusations identifying Christianity as an "impious heresy."[12] To be sure, the rabbis could call the Christians heretics (*minim*) without considering them to be Jewish. The accusation of heresy referred to the Christian self-identity as *verus Israel*. Such a self-identity, however, prevented seeing in them simply yet another kind of pagan. Hence stems the fundamental ambivalence, between a heresy and a religion, of the Jewish perception of earliest Christianity.

To a great extent, the *Dialogue with Trypho* will set the main parameters of the whole genre of *Adversus Judaeos* literature from patristic times on. In Justin's text, the figure of Abraham plays a major role in the dispute between Christians and Jews. Justin uses two different and, to some extent, contradictory lines of argument. On the one hand, he insists on the fact that Christians are the spiritual race of Abraham. On the other hand, he points

out that, through Mary, Jesus Christ belongs to the biological offspring of Abraham. Almost at the start of his book Justin states that the Christians are the true, the spiritual Israelite race (*genos*), that of Abraham and of the other patriarchs.[13] Yet he also insists, on three different occasions, upon the fact that the Virgin Mary comes from the offspring of Abraham. Her Son, then, "was born of a virgin of the race of Abraham."[14] Mary belongs to Abraham's "race," writes Justin.[15] What Justin wishes to establish here is the fact that Christian universalism can be expressed through the concept of the true Israel. The Christians are a people, indeed, the true people of Israel, and they will inherit God's promises made through Christ.[16] The circumcision and then the sabbath, the festivals, and the sacrifices were given as so many signs (*sēmeia*) because of the Israelites' hardened hearts. All these Israelite rituals were provisional and became obsolete with the coming of Christ. Abraham himself did not need such signs, as he was still uncircumcised when he was justified and blessed, because of his faith in God.[17] The Jews err when they claim to be Abraham's children. Only those Jews who will repent, finally recognizing the true meaning of the prophecies and the Torah, will inherit together with the Christians.[18]

This conceptual framework, established in the very first patristic so-called "Dialogue" with the Jews, would remain valid throughout the centuries. It represents the core of the conflict between the Church and the Synagogue. What is most significant from our perspective is the fact that for Justin, and for the patristic tradition after him, Christians are the true followers of Abraham's religion, a religion from which the Jews have deviated. According to the Qur'ran, the Jews and then the Christians had deviated from Abraham's true religion, which was reinstated by Muhammad's community of believers. This conception, as I argued in Chapter 6, is copied from the Christian one. The Islamic concept of "the peoples of the Book" (*ahl al-kitāb*) extends to Christians (and later also to Zoroastrians) the traditional patristic attitude to Jews.

In the early fourth century, Eusebius of Caesarea, to give only one example, follows in Justin's footsteps. He had argued at the outset of his *Ecclesiastical History*, that "it must clearly be held that the announcement to all peoples, recently made through the teaching of Christ, is the very first and most ancient and antique discovery of true religion (*theosebeias*) by Abraham and those lovers of God who followed him" (I.4.9–10). Regarding

Abraham, he had just written that “the children of the Hebrews boast [of him] as their own originator and ancestor (*archēgon kai propatera*)” (I.4.5). The obvious conclusion follows: it is the Christians, rather than the Jews, who are the true children of Abraham and who follow his religion, pure and original monotheism: “It is only among Christians throughout the whole world that the manner of religion which was Abraham’s can actually be found in practice” (I.4.14). Eusebius, then, argues that Christians, rather than Jews, are the real followers of Abraham’s pristine religion, a religion later “hijacked” by the Law of Moses, now obsolete. Here, of course, Eusebius follows Paul, for whom the Jews, by obeying the law of Arabian Sinai, are the spiritual offspring of Hagar (and hence of Ishmael), while the Christians are the true children of Sarah (Gal. 4: 21–31). For Eusebius, the Christians should “bypass” the Jews, as it were, and reclaim for themselves Abraham’s true religion, untainted by later additions.[19] We see now clearly that the Qur’an applies exactly the same logic also to Christians. The Gospel, just like the Torah, is a corruption of Abraham’s original religion: “O People of the Book (*Yā ahla al-kitābi*), why do you dispute concerning Abraham, when the Torah and the Gospel were only revealed after him? So you have no sense?” (Qur’an 3: 65).

IV

John of Damascus (*c*.676–749) was the last of the great Greek patristic authors, and the first Christian writer to refer to the doctrines of incipient Islam, which he calls "the religion of the Ismaelites (*hē…thrēskeia tōn Ismaēlitōn*), at the end of his book *On Heresies*, where it appears as chapter (or Heresy) 100.[20] John's perception of early Islam is quite parallel to the Jewish perception of early Christianity, according to Justin's testimony. In both cases, the new religion is endowed with an ambiguous status, a heresy rather than a religion in its own right. The new religion of the Ishmaelites, or Agarenes, sets itself quite clearly outside Christianity: they follow another prophet; they possess a new scripture. And yet, in Christian consciousness, there is simply no room for another, independent monotheistic religion. One is either a Christian (orthodox or heretic) or a pagan. Judaism itself is conceived as misunderstood Christianity, as it were. Similarly, one can hardly accuse the Arab followers of their new religion of polytheism. Now, polytheism is precisely the accusation brandished by the Muslims against the Christians, since Trinitarian doctrine reflects *shirk*: "association" (of other gods) to the Divinity. John nonetheless manages to accuse the Muslims both of "mutilating God" by taking the Logos from Him and of being idolaters through their veneration of the Meccan Ka'aba.[21] For John, Muhammad (*Mamed*), the false prophet of the Arabs, concocted his own heresy (*idian sunestēsato hairesin*), partly under the influence of an Arian monk.[22] He refers to the Qur'anic Docetic conception according to which the Jews "neither killed nor crucified him, but it was made to appear so unto them (*wa-lākin shubbiha lahum*)." In John's words, "The Jews only crucified [Jesus's] shadow (*tēn skian autou*)."[23] It stands to reason that early Islam was conversant with all the religious ideas of the world in which it was born.[24] Yet, we must seek to identify the proximate channels through which such ideas reached the Qur'an. While one should not expect such a quest to reach a single source, it stands to reason that Jewish-Christians, whom we know were still in existence in the seventh century, and also, perhaps, "Abrahamists," must be counted among these proximate channels.

The Syriac *Colloquium of Patriarch John with the Emir of the Agarians* preserves a summary of a discussion on religious principles held in 639 between the Muslim Emir and John, the Monophysite patriarch, whom the Emir had summoned.[25] To the Emir's question on the religion of Abraham and Moses, John answers: "Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, and the other prophets had and maintained the faith of the Christians." This remarkable sentence shows both the major importance granted to Abraham and the patriarchs by the first leaders of the Muslim community and the unwavering attitude of the Christians, since, at least, the days of Justin Martyr: Abraham was a Christian; that is, Christianity is the true religion of Abraham.[26]

V

Like all religions, late antique Christianity retained two highly different faces. On the one hand, its explicit theology progressively emerged from patristic literature, in particular from a long series of polemical works. On the other hand, one can detect what I propose to call the *implicit* theology of the church fathers. This implicit theology is inherent to their ethics and anthropology. In *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, published in French in 1932, the philosopher Henri Bergson distinguished two major types of religion, which he called, respectively, "closed" and "open" religion (*religion close*, *religion ouverte*). For him, the prophets of Israel, who represented, in stark contradistinction to the ritual laws of the Torah, a perfect example of open religion, would eventually lead to the message of Jesus and to Christianity. Despite the progressive building of ecclesial structures (the "routinization of charisma," in Weberian parlance), the prophetic element remained always present in late antiquity, by the nature of things often underlying heretical teachings. We have seen that monotheism cannot be used unqualified as the defining character of Christianity (and, of course, rabbinic Judaism). The major difference between biblical and philosophical monotheism is the prophetic character of the former, which sets ethics at the very core of religion—a *novum* in the ancient world.[27] If this is the case, the figure of Abraham remained throughout the patristic period a central point of reference, defining the nature of true, prophetic monotheism. The biblical story of Abraham, of course, teaches us that human sacrifice must be eradicated in ethical, prophetic monotheism. But the biblical patriarch is not only he who is ready to murder his son in order to obey God's will blindly. He also dares to bargain at length with God, in order to save Sodom, the sinning city. The ethical side of prophetic monotheism, as opened by Abraham, is also the open religion Bergson was speaking about.[28]

Running as a scarlet thread through the writings of the fathers, from Justin Martyr to John of Damascus, the Abrahamic principle at once permits and demands the constant ethical and spiritual renewal of religion. Christians argued with Jews, and then also with Muslims (and Muslims and Jews also argued with one another), as to who were the true sons of

Abraham. The latter represents at once the religious *koinē* and the principle of discord between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. I have spoken of the "Abrahamic moment" of late antiquity as of a *praeparatio coranica*: the ethical teachings of the church fathers and of the rabbis would soon become those of the Qur'an and then of the Muttakalimūn and the Sūfis, a fact underlined by some recent work.[29] It can be followed in the hermeneutical wars between the different late antique textual, or rather midrashic communities, as they function less as keepers of a sacred text than as its correct interpreters. The Abrahamic moment did less to promote ecumenism than to enhance the rise of heretical movements, each claiming that its own vision was the only correct one.

The Abrahamic moment of late antiquity forged an ecosystem of sorts, which extended in the Middle Ages from Baghdad to Toledo, at the very least, and within which Jews, Christians, and Muslims constantly interacted. One could perhaps conceive rabbinic Judaism, patristic Christianity, and early Islam as three different *prosōpa*, or, perhaps, *haireseis*, "parties" (in the original sense of the word)[30] of the Abrahamic movement. While each of these religions enhanced some Abrahamic aspects, as it were, they ignored others. The American Christian theologian Reinhold Niebuhr once said that Judaism and Christianity were each the heresy of the other. Today, if we are to reclaim the church fathers for the cultural memory of the twenty-first century, we must add Islam to this equation. The trajectory from Jerusalem to Mecca is no less central for the history of religions and cultures in late antiquity and beyond than that between Athens and Jerusalem. Culturally, as well as spiritually, we are all daughters and sons of Abraham, all inheritors of the late antique crucible.

[1] On Cyril's role in the murder of Hypatia, see Maria Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 97–8.

[2] See Guy G. Stroumsa, "Cultural Memory in Early Christianity: Clement of Alexandria and the History of Religions," in *Axial Civilizations and World History*, ed. Jóhann Páll Árnason, S. N. Eisenstadt, and Björn Wittrock, Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture, 4 (Leiden and Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2004), pp. 293–315.

[3] *Protr.* II.26.1–8.

[4] On this text, see the excellent analysis of Arthur J. Droge, *Homer or Moses?: Early Christian Interpretations of the History of Culture* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1989).

[5] See in particular the studies collected in Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede, *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), and in Stephen Mitchell and

Peter van Nuffelen, eds, *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). See further Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, *Dio unico, pluralità e monarchia divina: Esperienze religiose e teologie nel mondo tardo-antico* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2010).

[6] *Historia Augusta* 29. 2. Most ancient historians agree today that the third-century lives in the *Historia Augusta* are largely fictional creations from the late fourth century, informed by contemporary struggles between paganism and Christianity.

[7] "I am one of those who avoid keeping their festivals with the Jews; but nevertheless I revere always the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; who, being themselves Chaldaeans, of a sacred race, skilled in theurgy, had learned the practice of circumcision while they sojourned as strangers with the Egyptians. And they revered a God who was ever gracious to me and to those who worshipped him as Abraham did, for he is a very great and powerful God, but he has nothing to do with you. For you do not imitate Abraham by erecting altars to him, or building altars of sacrifice and worshipping him as Abraham did, with sacrificial offerings. For Abraham used to sacrifice even as we Hellenes do, always and continually. And he used the method of divination from shooting stars. Probably this also is a Hellenic custom." Julian, "Against the Galileans" (354B–356B), in *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, trans. Wilmer C. Wright, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 3 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1923), pp. 422–3.

[8] Damascius, *Life of Isidorus*, 141: *Ha te eis kainotomian apo tēs Abramou thrēskeias aporrueisan, ta de Hellēnōn ēgapēsen* (*Damascii Vitae Isidori Reliquiae*, ed. Clemens Zintzen (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1967), p. 196; *Neoplatonic Saints: The Lives of Plotinus and Proclus by Their Students*, trans. and ed. M. Edwards, Translated Texts for Historians, 35 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), p. 55, n. 2). Cf. M. Tardieu, *Annuaire du Collège de France 2005–2006*, p. 438. On the temple of Zeus Hypsistos, see Nicole Belayche, "Hypsistos: Une voie de l'exaltation des dieux dans le polythéisme gréco-romain," *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 7 (2005), esp. pp. 51–4.

[9] Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum*, VII.

[10] Henry Chadwick, *The Circle and the Ellipse: Rival Concepts of Authority in the Early Church; an Inaugural Lecture Delivered before the University of Oxford on 5 May 1959.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959).

[11] On Abraham in the Qur'an, see the entry on Abraham by Reuven Firestone, "Abraham," *The Encyclopedia of the Qur'an* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001), pp. 2–11 (with bibliography). According to a seventh-century Christian source, Muhammad "taught [the Arabs] to recognize the God of Abraham, especially because he was learned and informed on the history of Moses." See Sebeos, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, trans. Robert W. Thomson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), vol. 1, p. 135.

[12] *hairesin atheōn christianōn*; *Dial. Tryph.* 17.1 (226–7 Bobichon). For Justin's text, I use Justin Martyr, *Dialogue avec le Tryphon: Édition critique*, ed. and trans. Philippe Bobichon (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2003), vol. 1, text and trans., vol. 2, comm.

[13] *Dial. Tryph.*, 11.5; Justin Martyr, pp. 212–13.

[14] *Dial. Tryph.*, 43.1; Justin Martyr, pp. 288–9.

[15] *Dial. Tryph.*, 100.3; Justin Martyr, pp. 454–5. It may be relevant to point out, with the *Dialogue*'s latest editor, Philippe Bobichon, that most previous editors and translators of the text have, with no justification, emended the text, correcting "Abraham" into "Adam."

[16] *Dial. Tryph.* 44.1–2.

[17] *Dial. Tryph.* 23.3; Justin Martyr, pp. 240–1.

[18] *Dial. Tryph.* 23.

[19] Eusebius develops the same argument in his *Chronography* (the first part of his *Chronicle*, for which the birth of Abraham (in 2016 BCE) is the starting point of Christianity, a religion, then, older than Judaism. See Simon Price and Peter Thonemann, *The Birth of Classical Europe: A History from Troy to Augustine* (London and New York: Allen Lane, 2010), pp. 312–13.

[20] This work was redacted rather late, after 743. I am using the text in Jean Damascène, *Écrits sur l'Islam*, trans. Raymond Le Coz (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1992). On views of the Arabs and of early Islam among contemporary Christian writers, see ch. 10 "Barbarians or Heretics" above.

[21] Respectively Heresy 100.4 (Jean Damascène, pp. 216–19), where John rebuffs the Muslim accusation of the Christians for associating Christ to God, and Heresy 100.5 (Jean Damascène, pp. 218–21.), where John returns the Muslim accusation of the Christians for being idolaters by revering the cross.

[22] Heresy 100.1 (Jean Damascène, pp. 210–13.). On the famous story of Muhammad and the monk Bahira, see Krisztina Szilagyi, "Muhammad and the Monk: The Making of the Christian Baḥīra Legend," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 34 (2008), 169–214.

[23] K 4: 156–8. See Heresy 100.2 (Jean Damascène, pp. 212–13.). On Docetic conceptions in early Christianity, see Guy G. Stroumsa, "Christ's Laughter: Docetic Origins Reconsidered," *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 12 (2004), 267–88, and Guy G. Stroumsa and Ronnie Goldstein, "The Greek and Jewish Origins of Docetism: A New Proposal," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 10 (2007), 423–41.

[24] As argued by Sidney Harrison Griffith, "'Syriacisms in the 'Arabic Qur'an': Who Were Those Who Said 'Allah Is Third of Three' According to Al-Ma'ida 73?," in *A Word Fitly Spoken: Studies in Mediaeval Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and the Koran, Presented to Haggai Ben Shammai*, ed. Meir Michael Bar-Asher, Simon Hopkins, Sarah Stroumsa, and Bruno Chiesa (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2007), pp. 83–110, esp. 108–10.

[25] According to the legend, Amrou would, a few years later and on the orders of the Caliph, burn the Alexandrian library, since one single book, the Qur'an, was sufficient for all purposes.

[26] In this text, as well as in the seventh-century Greek Christian anti-Jewish polemics, the so-called *Trophies of Damascus*, rabbis play the role of "theological consultants" to the Muslims, a fact which shows the extent to which, for Christians, Jews and Muslims were perceived as two groups rather close to one another.

[27] One example out of many: "The only true religion is that which is based upon virtue and justice" (Nulla igitur alia religio uera est nisi quae uirtute et iustitia constat), Lactantius, *Inst. Div.* VI.25.7, Lactantius, *Institutions divines, Livre V, Tome I*, ed. and trans. P. Monat (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1973), pp. 374–7.

[28] For an insightful presentation of traditional Jewish views on Abraham, see Stéphane Mosès, Marc de Launay, and Olivier Revault d'Allonnes, *Le sacrifice d'Abraham: La ligature d'Isaac* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2002), chap. 1.

[29] I am referring in particular to "Les Pères de l'église et la pensée de l'Islam," in *L'Orient chrétien dans l'empire musulman: Hommage au professeur Gérard Troupeau*, ed. Geneviève

Gobillot and Marie-Thérèse Urvoy (Versailles: Éditions de Paris, 2005), 59ff. Gobillot insists on the strong similarities between the Qur'anic conception of the *fitra*—the original religious nature of man, and the views on the question developed by Lactantius. The theories of Christoph Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran: Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache* (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 2000), have not carried much scholarly consensus.

30 See Heinrich von Staden, "*Hairesis* and Heresy: The Case of the *Haireseis Iatrikai*," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. 3: *Self-Definition in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. Ben F. Meyer and E. P. Sanders (London: SCM Press, 1982), pp. 76–100, 199–206.

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